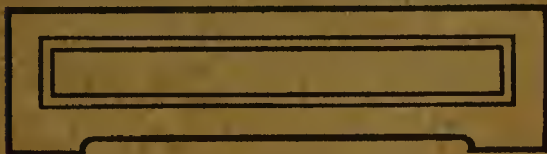




A LOCAL COLORIST



ANNIE TRUMBULL SLOSSON



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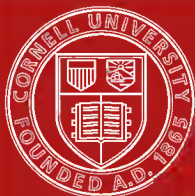
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A LOCAL COLORIST



"And be sure you put in lots of local color."

A LOCAL COLORIST

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BY

ANNIE TRUMBULL SLOSSON

AUTHOR OF

"FISHIN' JIMMY," "STORY-TELL LIB," ETC.

NEW YORK
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A LOCAL COLORIST

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A LOCAL COLORIST

WHEN I was a mite of a child I was always sayin' that I'd be a book-writer when I growed up. I rec'lect lots of times folks askin' me—as they're always doin' with young ones, you know—what I was goin' to be when I got a woman grown, and my sayin' every time I should be a great author. Sometimes I'd make it more partic'lar and say a poet or a story-writer, or again I'd have it a editor or some kind of newspaper-maker, but most gen'rally 'twas just a plain author, no partic'lar sort. So, feelin' that way from the very beginnin', 'twas queer that I never did write for print as the years went by. I was forever thinkin' about it, plannin' for it, surmisin' just how 'twould feel when my own makin's-up was printed out and read all over the airth, and I never for one single minute give up bein' certain sure that before I died—and long afterward, too—I should be known and spoke of as a great, a dreadful great, authoress. But I never seemed to get at

it. You see, I was so busy. I never had to work for my livin', but I was oldest of five and had lots to do helpin' ma with the little ones and the housework.

Then there was school and lessons till I was nigh seventeen, and after that beaux, and pretty soon one beau in partic'lar—Mr. Kidder, you know. You can't write much in courtin' days, nor in marryin'-time neither, and 'course when little Nathan come and then Fanny Ann and Prudence, my hands were too full for authorin'. But I kep' on lottin' on doin' it some day, knowin' I should manage it somehow.

It wa'n't till I was left all alone by myself two year ago that I felt I could really begin. I set the day quite a spell aforehand. It was to be the 28th of May. The spring cleanin' would be through by that time, and the preservin' and cannin' and puttin' up jell and pickles not begun. Only a few summer boarders gen'rally come as early as that, so there wouldn't be much goin' on outside to watch from the windows and take off my mind. Altogether it seemed just the right time. Of course there had to be a set day in case my writin's turned out pop'lar and talked about, and I was pretty cer-

tain they would. Folks always want to know all about great writers, and I kep' sayin' over to myself words from the newspaper accounts: "It was only a few years ago, on the 28th of May, that this interestin'"—or "thrillin'," or "beautiful," or somethin', as the case might be—"authoress begun her first and perchance her greatest book."

I laid in my writin' things, a new bottle of ink, some pens, and a quire of paper, and fixed my table in a good light. That was in March, for I was always forehanded. I was beginnin' to be a mite impatient, wantin' to have the worst over, when one day a new idee come into my head. Up to that cold March mornin', if you'll believe it, I never once thought what kind of writin' I should begin with; verses or prose pieces, narr'tives or what-all, I hadn't decided on any of 'em. It didn't take very long, though. I was dreadful fond of story-books, and I never cared no great for poetry or lives of folks or travellin' adventur's. I'd write stories, just one first off, and then a lot of 'em "by the authoress of ——" My! I hadn't fixed on a name. But that could come later when I knew what kind of a story it was. Then come the hardest of all

—what it should be about. I couldn't make up my mind about that. I won't go over all the different plans I had; to write about lords and earls or lay it in heathen lands or in *Mayflower* days among the Pilgrims, or in the Civil War, or among pirates and Captain Kidd, or early Christian martyrs. I went over all them and lots more, but wasn't a bit nearer decidin', when Mary Dowd passed through here on her way to Hall. She'd writ me aforehand, and I went over to the depot to see her. There was only about half an hour between trains, and we had a great deal to say. She is real smart, you know—had the Dayville School three terms, and is a great book-reader, so I wanted her advice. But she was all for my tellin' her first how my rhubarb pies was made; then she branched off into pie crust gen'rally, and how hers never had that light shortness mine always had, and it was only a few minutes before train-time that I got a chance to put my case. She was real interested, and she says right off quick, without havin' to think it over, "Oh," she says, "write a dialect story; that's the only thing that takes these days." "What in creation's that?" I says, and she looked most sorry for me. But she's real

kind-hearted, and she begun to explain. Before I could get much idee of the thing the train whistled and she started to pick up her bag. Near as I could understand, dialect—I didn't know just how to spell it or speak it then, but I got it right afterward—dialect was any kind of queer, outlandish talk folks in any deestrick use, the queerer the better. The more you put in your story and the worse 'twas spelt and the harder to understand, why, as I gathered from what she said as she climbed up the steps—bag in one hand and umbrella in the other and a book under each arm, so't she couldn't help steppin' on her skirt in front every step—why, the better your story was and the bigger pay it fetched. "But where'll I get this derelict talk?" I says, not gettin' the right word first off, and knowin' the other from Captain Gates, who'd followed the sea. "Go 'round till you find it," she says, as she went into the car, and tripped on the sill so's she most fell over, "and then write it out." "How'll I know how to spell it?" I calls out as she settles into her seat and begins to fix her things. "You don't have to know," says she through the window; "don't make any difference how it's spelt; that's why it's so easy."

Just as the train started she put her face down to the open part of the window—it was only up a little way and was wedged there as they always be in cars—and called out, “And be sure you put in lots of local color.” “What color?” I hollered out as loud as I could. I see her mouth open, but I couldn’t for the life of me catch a word, and in a jiffy she was out of sight. Well, I wrote to her for more partic’lars, and she sent me a whole sheetful of explainin’s. She said dialect was most everywheres, but different in different places. I’d find it nigh me or further away. But when I’d got it I mustn’t only take it down lit’ral, but I must put in the color she’d spoke of, which meant the sort of folks that talked the dialect, how they looked and acted, and all about the place and the scenery, and partic’lar the weather. There must be dark, lowerin’ clouds, or an azure sky or wailin’ winds or lurid sunsets or something similar. That was all called local color, she said, and it was a most important—in fact, a necessary ingredjent. “Like lard in pie crust,” I says to myself, for that word ingredjent sounded like receipt-book talk, and the last part of her letter was about my rhubarb pies again.

Well, 'course I had to begin now, first thing, to hunt up folks that talked dialects, and it wasn't any easy job I tell you. Mary'd said it might be found right 'round you or further away. 'Twas certain sure it couldn't be 'round me, for I lived then, just as I do now, here in the mountains, though it was in Francony those days instead of here in Lisbon, and there wasn't a thing of the kind in the whole place. I knew every single soul for miles 'round, and they all talked good, plain, sensible talk like everybody else, nothin' queer or what you might call dialectic. But I was set on bein' fair and correct, and not leavin' any stone unturned, as the sayin' is, without turnin' it up. So I went over in my mind all the folks there and what languages they used. I didn't seem to find anything sing'lar, but thinks I, I'll go 'round amongst the people a little and talk with 'em and take partic'lar notice of what they say. It didn't come to anythin'. Even the old aged folks that might have fetched down from past generations some strange lingo or other, they talked the right kind of talk we all of us use. I didn't tell 'em what I was at, but sort of drawed 'em out on different subjects and watched sharp for any

dialects. But not a sign of 'em turned up. Even Gran'sir Peckham, more'n eighty year old, didn't show a mite of it. I talked about the weather with him as he stood at the gate one time; asked him if he thought 'twould be a nice day, and so on. He said just what anybody anywheres that had took notice of the clouds would say, that it was goin' to be catchin' weather like the day afore, when he got soppin' wet over to the medder lot, and he cal'lated 'twould keep on thataway till the moon full'd. "'T any rate," he says, "it's growthy weather for grass." Nobody could have talked sensibler nor more like other folks nor with scurser dialect. And Aunt Drusilly Bowles, born and raised right there on the Butter Hill road, she was just the same. A mite of a body she is, you know, lookin' as if you could blow her over with one breath, but tough and rugged. She was carryin' two pails of water, one in each hand, as I went by, and I called out to her, "Ain't they heavy?" I says. "Not a mite—that is, for me," says she. "I could heft twice as much." She come out to the road, still a-carryin' the pails, and went on talkin'. "I don't see," says she, "but I'm jest as spry and up-

and-doin' as I was twenty year back. The Priests, our branch—mother's side, ye know—they're a long-lived tribe and peart and chirky to the last. Ma herself was dreadful poor, never weighed ninety pound in all her born days, but she was powerful strong, all bone and sinner to the last. There wa'n't never a peakid or pindlin' Priest I ever heerd tell on," she says, straightenin' up, sort o' proud like. And it was all like that, plain, nat'ral language like anybody's, not a sign of dialection, as you might call it. So I traipsed 'round that town till my feet ached lookin' for what I knowed aforehand wasn't there. I wouldn't go anywheres else till I'd tried every chance to home.

When I was sure there wasn't a speck of real dialect in Francony nor for miles 'round there, I took the cars for Haverhill, where my niece's son, Eben Reynolds, lived. Ridin' in the stage over to Bethlehem for the mornin' train, I couldn't get this thing out o' my head. You're somethin' of a writer yourself, ma'am, and must know how it kind o' spiles things havin' to think how they'd look in print. I know I heerd Leonard Colby say once—he used to write pieces for the paper, you know—that he

couldn't even say good night to his girl when he was keepin' company with Ellen Peabody without thinkin' to himself how 'twould be called in print "a yearnin' embrace" or somethin'; said it took part of the int'rest out of it. So 'twas with me that time. 'Twas a real nice mornin', a spring feelin' in the air, the trees not exactly budded out, but showin' they were goin' to be pretty soon, a kind of live purplish gray all over 'em, and the sky a pictur'. But I couldn't just set still and let it all soak into me without actually thinkin' about it, as I used to, no more'n these new folks that call themselves natur'-lovers can really love natur'. They're after book names for what they see, examples of amazin' smartness in birds or creatur's like what Professor Thingamy or Doctor Thisorthat writ about. And I was huntin' for the dialect way of tellin' what I see that day. I looked up to the sky, such a pretty blue, and the little soft white woolly clouds strimmered all over it, and I wondered if there was any dialectic word that answered to strimmer. Seems 's if there couldn't be one that pictur'd out the real thing so good. For them clouds was strimmered and nothin' else. I thought as I see the apple trees

with their spranglin', crooked, knotty branches showin' a'ready signs of the spring life, thinks, I "They'll be pink with blowth afore we know it." And then 'stead of just being comfortable and pleased over that idee I went and begun guessin' if there was any other word in any part of the world that stood for "blowth." Certain sure there couldn't be a word that described things so plain. Why, you can't only see the posies as you're sayin' it, but you can act'ally smell 'em. "Oh, how glad I be," I says to myself, "that I don't have to talk dialect or any other outlandish languages started, I daresay, in Babel times when folks got so mixed up and confused." 'Course I'm always kind to foreigners and make allowances for 'em. Look at it one way, it ain't their fault their talkin' that way. But I feel to rejoice, as they say in prayer-meetin', that I wasn't born or raised one. Sometimes seems 's if, even if I had been, I'd have broke away when I growed up and sensed things. I can't pictur' anybody with a drop of Spooner blood in 'em talkin' such lingo as Dutch Peter over to Lisbon or Mary Bodoë on Wallace Hill keep jabberin' all the time. However and where-withal, as Deacon Lamb used to say in meetin's,

thankful as I might be that I talked good New Hampshire, I was bound to find the other kind afore May 28th, when my book was to begin.

But I hadn't any more luck Haverhill way than 'round home. It made me feel real mean, too, visitin' as I was and folks showin' me so much attention, and me spyin' on 'em, as you might say, and prickin' up my ears in hopes of hearin' some queer dialecty talk to use in my writin's. Served me right that I didn't hear a speck. Eben's folks come from our way, and o' course they talked good Francony-American, and their neighbors done the same. When I went over the river to Bradford I was in Vermont, you know. I thought mebbe they'd speak different over there, but they didn't. They conversed jest our way, only more so, if anything. For some of the old folks kep' up words I had 'most forgot, but good, sensible, straight-meanin' words, with nothin' outlandish or dialectical about 'em. Grandma Quimby, raised in Whitefield, but marryin' a Bradford man and livin' there thirty year, she says when I asked her how her little granddaughter Dorry was, "Little?" say she. "Why, you'd ought to see her; she's a great big gormin' girl now."

That "gormin'" did bring back old times and pa. He always applied that term to me when I was growin' up, and it's a scrumtious word. I do lot on words that pictur' things out like that. And her daughter, Aunt Meeny Tucker, she puts in: "And Cyrus's gettin' a big boy too. It's all his pa can do to manage him. He's got the Dodge grit, and he's real masterful, runs all over the town without leave, the kitin'est boy." Exactly what ma used to say about Dan'l. Oh, I do so set by the good, plain, meanin' talk! By this time I see I must go further away if I expected to get hold of anything to use in my writin's, and I decided to go to Nashaway to Jane Webster's, and if I didn't get it there to keep on as fur as Brown's Corners, 'cross the Massachusetts line. "If I don't find it there," I says to myself, "I'll give up. I can't go to Injy's coral strands, not even to find ingredjents for my book-writin'."

'Twas the same story at Nashaway, no dialects at all, not the least taste, though I visited 'round, in all classes, as they say. Then I went to Massachusetts. But, dear land! Brown's Corners wasn't a mite different from Francony or Lisbon, Haverhill or Bradford. Common talk

full o' common sense, both of 'em common to all New England, f'r aught I know. I didn't know anybody at the Corners but Mis' Harris Spooner, own cousin to Mr. Kidder's first wife, and I put up with her. She'd always lived in Massachusetts, born there, and I sort of hoped I could pick up something sing'lar in her conversation worth puttin' into my story. But 'twas no good; seems even there so nigh to Boston their languages is same as ourn. She didn't talk of anything scursely but about Viletty—Mr. Kidder's first, you know, my predecessor, 's they say—and how pious and sickly she was. Told me all about her last days, how white and meechin' she looked, and how dreadful poor and skinny, and yet how she hung on, hung on till seemed 's if she never'd pass away. And she dwelt on Mr. Kidder's sorrer and how he kind o' clung to Viletty 's if he couldn't part with her, and how mebbe that was the reason she hung on, hung on so long. She said some folks think if you hold on too tight to them you set by when they're sick and ready to go, they can't break loose, somethin' seems to draw 'em back and pin 'em down. And she told how she says to him frequent, "Reuben, Reuben," says she,

“let her go home, loose your hold and let her depart.” Well, seems he did. ’T any rate she did depart, or else o’ course I wouldn’t have been Mis’ Reuben Kidder now. ’Twas real interestin’ and nigh about all news to me, for Mr. Kidder wasn’t no great of a talker. Anyway, men folks never seem to talk about things as well as women, do they? Leave out the little trimmin’s that set it off so and stick to main facts, the last thing we care about. He’d never once mentioned all the time we lived together how Viletty had hung on, hung on, and it’s bein’ thought likely ’twas because of his tight hold on her. You’d think he’d a-known it would be entertainin’ to me, takin’ Viletty’s place as I had. The whole narr’tive was spoke in as good plain talk as any I could have put it in myself, down to the very end, Viletty’s dyin’ words, the layin’ out, the wreaths and crowns and pillars from the neighbors, and the funeral exercises. She said she’d take me out to the buryin’-ground afore I left, a dreadful sightly place on Dodd’s Hill, to see the grave. I’d have admired to go, but it rained the whole endurin’ time, and I didn’t get a chance.

Well, here ’twas the 24th of May, and no dia-

lections to put into that story that was to be started on the 28th. I was dreadful upset and put out. Seemed certain sure that I couldn't do the kind of book that was most in the fashion that time, and so must set to work at something different. As for the local color, if that only meant sceneries and weather and actin's and doin's, why, I could fix them all right, but, as I understood Mary Dowd to say, that wasn't no use without a lot o' this dialect, and that I couldn't find high nor low. Up to that time I hadn't told a single creatur' what I was at. But that day, as I was goin' along in the train, who should get in at Greenfield station but Abby Matthews on her way home from visitin' with Ephraim's folks. I was so glad to see her, and so filled up with all I'd been through and wanted to go through, that I spilled over and emptied out my whole heart. I told her every single thing, how I'd always been set on bein' an authoress and what Mary Dowd said and how I'd traipsed all over the airth lookin' for dialects and couldn't find a speck, and me only four days from the date I'd set for beginnin' my great, prob'ly my greatest, work. She was real interested and pleased too, said 'twould be

a great thing for Francony and for Grafton County—in fact, for the whole State o' New Hampshire—to have an authoress of their own. As for this dialect, she said she'd heerd of it as bein' all the go nowadays in storybook writin', but to the best of her rememberin' she hadn't never seen a case of it herself. It was some kind of queer-soundin' talk when you heerd it, and queerer-lookin' when you read it, and the spellin' was every which way, no reg'lar rule. As for her, says she, she never conceited folks did talk just that way in any deestric on the airth; she'd always held that the story-writers made it up as they went along, and she'd advise me to do so myself. As for "local color," she never'd heerd of such a thing, and I'd better not have anything to do with it. "Tell your story plain and straight, and put everything down in black and white and steer clear o' any other colors, local or be-they-who-they-be," she says. "But I can't make up a thing I don't know anything about," says I. "If I only could see a sample of this dialectical talk or hear somebody speak a mite of it, I'd see where I was standin', but I can't make a start afore I know more about it; that's the thing of it. I'm every

bit as sot as you can be, Abby Matthews, on beginnin' this great work. All is, I must have a mite of a hint or a help to start me, and then I can go on like a house afire." She see the sense of that, and just then the train slowed up comin' into Bath, where she was goin' to get out, and in a minute I was left by myself again.

"Well, Abby ain't been of much use in one way," thinks I, "but she gave me sympathy, and 'twas a sight of comfort to talk things over with her. And, after all, I guess sympathy's worth more'n dialect in the long run, and sometimes seems 's if 'twas nigh about as scurse." I just gave up hope that night, yet 'twas only next day that I found what I was lookin' for—dialect and plenty of it.

I'm afraid you won't hardly understand, and mebbe 'll think it dreadful when I tell you 'twas in answer to prayer. I've always been in the habit of askin' the Lord for what I wanted, even if I wasn't sure 'twas a right thing to want. I left it to Him to decide that and to show me if I'd made a mistake. He give the gift of tongues one time, you know, and He promises to put the very words into your mouth that you'd ought to speak in tryin' times, so why'd this thing

be so dreadful different? Anyway, I tried it, and I told Him the whole story that night. And I says if there wasn't any harm in my bein' an authoress—and lots of real Christians followed that business, as He well knew—and if I couldn't be a real fav'rite without puttin' in this thing, would He p'int out to me where to find it and how I'd ought to make use of it and, if 'twas possible, to do good with it. I got up real comforted and went to bed easier in my mind than I had for a long spell. I was 'round the house next forenoon doin' the work, and I stepped to the window to shake out my dust-cloth. I see some one goin' along the road; a stranger I knew 'twas right off. 'Twas a young lady, real nice-lookin', and I guessed she must be an early summer boarder. I didn't want to be seen starin' at her, and was just goin' to step back out o' sight, when she looked up and smiled in a real pretty, friendly way. 'Course I smiled back, and she come closer and says "Good morning." I slat the dust-cloth down and come 'round to the front door, and in five minutes we was talkin' away like old cronies. Seems she was stayin' over to Mis' Nichols's—I'd heerd they was expectin' a boarder—only come night before, and she was lookin'

'round the place. Well, I hadn't heerd her say a dozen words 'fore I see she talked different from the folks 'round there, different from anybody I'd heerd anywheres. Now I can't show you just how 'twas different. I never could act out things and show how folks did 'em, copyin' their talk and ways. I always broke down and sp'iled the dialogues at school exhibition if they give me a part. But I can tell you some of the things that made this talk so dreadful queer and give me, right at the very beginnin', what they call in prayer-meetin' a tremblin' hope that I was findin' what I'd looked for so long.

First place, everything she said sounded like readin' out of a book. Now you know 'most everybody has two kinds of talk, one for speakin' and the other for writin' and readin'. Talk-talk and book-talk, as you might put it. But my! you couldn't see any difference here; any of it might have been read off from a book or a paper. And then such queer, long stretched-out words, some of 'em span new to me and some I'd seen in books or heerd in sermons or lectur's. She had a way of stoppin' short 'twixt her words that I couldn't make out or get used to, like this: When she wanted to say she didn't

like winter 's well as summer she said she "did not like it at," then a kind of stop before she put in "all." First off I thought it was an accident and she'd stopped to swaller or get her breath or something. But she done it again and kep' doin' it, and I see 'twas a habit—part of her dialects. "At—all" says she every single time 'stead of "atall," as everybody else says. Then the most musical thing—I almost laughed every time she said it—when she asked me if I'd ever been somewheres or done something partic'lar she'd say "Did—you" this or that, with a stop between the words long enough for a swaller, or a stutter, or a gap, or a hiccup. "Did—you" she'd always say, 'stead of "didjer," as other folks say. And when she wanted to put in "ever" she'd stop the same way 'twixt you and ever. "Did-you-ever" she says, 'stead of the right way, "Didgever," like other folks. She was int'rested in all I said and real friendly, wanted to keep me talkin', and hoped she wasn't inconveniencin' me, and so on. And when I said I wasn't partic'lar busy, only just potterin' 'round, she says, "Potterin'! Such a delightful term!" she says; "it reminds me of Keeram-mix" whoever he was—"and the plastic art.

Potterin'!" she says over again, laughin', as if 'twas some uncommon, foreignish word or other. Where *did* she come from? Why, that word's used all over the airth, far's I know. I did hear a woman one time from down Connecticut way say putterin' 'stead of potterin', but I guess that was only her way of pronouncin' it. When I says of Joel Butts, settin' on his door-step 'cross the street, that he was "shif'less as a cow blackbird," she claspt her hands and says, "Delicious! and shows such a fa-mil-i-ar-i-ty with nature and a certain knowledge of orni—something." (I writ that down as quick as she went away.) 'Course I didn't let her see I was usin' her for a copy; she didn't suspicion it. She ast lots of questions and listened sharp to what I said. But I guess she see pretty quick there wa'n't nothin' queer about my languages. The commonest things, the talk used by all sensible folks the world over, seemed to strike her most and stir her all up. Times I thought she wasn't exactly polite, what we'd call, for she'd repeat over somethin' I'd said and laugh, but as she always ended by praisin' it up I didn't mind. And I was so tickled at findin' a case of genuin' dialects. There was a chiny posy-

holder in my window with some dried grass in it from last year, just a common one, had belonged to ma. She didn't seem to know what 'twas 'tall; asked if it was an "antic" or a "airloom"; and again she spoke of it as a "varze." When I told her over again and louder, conceitin' she might be a mite hard o' hearin', that 'twas only a old crock'ry posy-holder, she hollered out, "Posy-holder—how dear!" And I hadn't said a word about the price. I didn't want to sell it, anyway. "Posy," says she, "the quaint old word of the poets, Old English," she says. But I told her no, 'twas Chineese, I guessed, fetched over by ma's brother, Uncle Elam, who fol-lered the sea.

That started her off again, and she says it after me: "Follered the sea! How expressive and vivid, suggestin' the call of the ocean to its lovers," and such queer crazy-soundin' talk. I had to write it down quick, makin' an excuse to go into the other room. Another thing queer was her 'pologizin' the whole 'durin' time for goodness knows what and beggin' me to forgive her for somethin' or 'nother. If she didn't sense what I said and wanted to hear it over again, she'd ask me to excuse her dumbness by sayin'

"Beg pardon." Time and again she says that when she hadn't done a thing, and when I answered polite every time, "Don't mention it," I see she was still expectin' somethin' and waitin' for me to say over again what I'd said afore. Then I see 'twas dialect for "What say?" and I put it down on my list. She had lots of those dialectics. When she was surprised at anything I'd tell her, she'd say, kind o' drawlin' like, "Fancy!" the fan part sort o' spread out, and I found that meant "Do tell" or "You don't say." And over 'n' over when I fetched in some common sayin', a weather sign about thunder in the mornin', farmers take warnin', or how turnin' back some o' your clothes you'd put on wrong side afore was bad luck, or any such well-known things, she'd say a real queer word. "Foclore," most 's if she was swearin', as Uncle Ben Knapp used to say "C'rinthians!" when he got excited.

One time I fetched her out a glass of milk and some hot gingerbread I'd just baked, and I fixed her in the rocker under the big ellum. She was real tickled, and give me to understand that it made her think of somebody named Al Fresscoe. I s'pose he most gen'rally et outdoors. She

always had some queer remark to make about everything. When Si Little's ox team was standin' out in the road one day she went out and looked right into the creatur's' faces, and she says over some lingo about Juno and oxides; or mebbe 'twas ox-hides. And when I was tellin' her about Elbert Hill and how climbin' he was, how he'd come up from a poor boy, and now took in partner with Knight Brothers and aimin' to be a selectman some day, she was real struck and says, "Excelsior!" I think 'twas that; 'twas some kind o' stuffin' material, anyway. Even the commonest things like sayin' Jabez Goss was the well-to-doist man in Littleton, which everybody knows he is, she'd appear so struck or tickled over. I'd wonder every minute what fur-off ign'rant country she come from. Once I was tellin' her about Jesse Baker to Sugar Hill and how he could make verses on anything in the heavens or airth or the waters under the airth, f'r aught I know. I said nobody ever learnt him how to do it, he just took to it soon's he could speak; 'twas natur', I guessed. And she says some of her queer outlandish jabber about poets bein' nasty and not fit. She didn't say for what. Wonder if she'd say that

about Watts and the rest o' the hymn-makers. 'Course this I'm tellin' you didn't all take place in that first meetin'. It wanted four days then to the 28th, the time I was to become an authoress, and I contrived to see Miss Mandeville (I'd found out her name) lots. I'd run out in the front yard whenever I see her comin' by, and I'd happen into the store if she went in. She was more'n willin' to talk with me, and I got together a whole mess of dialections and writ 'em down careful, though I didn't worry about the spellin', as I'd heerd that wasn't no great matter. She come into my house two or three times and was real int'rested in my things and talked dialect about 'em like a streak all the time. She looked at my old clock on the mantel-shelf that was grandma's and asked about it. It had stopped, as it had a way of doin' frequent, and I told her it didn't keep reg'lar time like my new one in the kitchen, but I said I liked it better than that one because it had been in our family so long and I'd seen it since I was a speck of a young one, and she says, "That goes without sayin'," says she. I hadn't an idee what she meant, for it don't go at all most times whether you say anything or not.

She was lookin' over my photograph album and she come to a likeness of Timothy Banks that used to keep store to Whitefield and moved down East. She turned it over to look on the back for his name, I s'pose, and she says, "Oh, Parree!" 'Twas one of her by-words, I guess, for there wa'n't any name there, only the man that took the pictur' down in Paris, Maine, where the Bankses live. Oh, she had some outlandish word for everything under the sun. What do you think she called goin' anywheres to stay over Sabbath day? You'd never guess. Wee Kend! 'Pears to be dialect for visitin' from Saturday to Monday—bakin'-day to wash-day, you know. But I can't tell you half; 'twould take a month o' Sundays.

She had out-o'-the-wayest words for everything. Speakin' o' Lyman Waters and how he'd fell away from his religion and now didn't even believe there was any God at all, what do you think she called him? An agg nostick! That was her dialection for a plain, common infidel that says in his heart there is no God. The Bible just calls him a fool, you know. And them different ways folks get into by spells, catchin' ways, you know, that runs through a

deestrickt, she spoke of as fads. Asked me one time if I'd took up this new fad of mas-ticatin' my food a long time as recommended by Whitcher, or Belcher, or some one or other. But I told her no, I just chewed my victuals before swallowin', 's I always had.

I was so tickled by findin' all these dialects for my story that I 'most forgot I hadn't got a mite of local color to spread over 'em. How could I get it, not knowin' anything of the kind of local'ty she come from, her folks, and her bringin' up? Mebbe, thinks I, that will come out after a spell, and I can put it on last thing, like the third coat o' paint 'Lias Davis is puttin' on his house 'cross the road there. Sing'lar, I says to myself, to speak o' writin' 's if 'twas different colors. Though, come to think of it, I've heard of blue laws and blue books and yellow newspapers, red letters and black lists. But I never knew anything till lately of this local colorin' matter to stories, and I haven't got an idee how to put it on, just plain and thick all over, or strimmered about and different in spots. 'Course I could describe Miss Mandeville and all her colors—reddish hair, and indiger blue eyes, and pale-complected, and all. I could put

in the weather, too; there's more in Francony than most deestrics, and it's all colors, too, probably local 's well as the rest, though I hadn't got yet a real clear idee what that was. But that way-off, sing'lar land she come from, where her folks lived, and everybody talked dialect talk, why, I hadn't no more idee how to paint it out than—than anything.

Well, come May 28th, I waked up 'fore sunrise full o' my story. I got breakfast out o' the way and washed up the dishes bright and early and done the housework so's to be all ready to set down to my writin'. My list o' dialections, all took from this queer boarder's talk, was real lengthy now, plenty to begin with, anyway. As for the colorin', I could put in some weather and scenery—Mary Dowd said that was part of it—and touch it up bime-by with another shade or so as I got some more information. I'm sot on havin' lots of that color 'tany rate, thinks I, so if it runs or fades there'll be enough left to show. I'd tried my pen and found it went all right, and took a clean sheet o' paper to begin, when all of a sudden I rec'lected that I hadn't said my prayers that mornin'. I was dreadful ashamed. But it's bein' the great an-

niversary I'd looked ahead to so long and me so excited and nerved up and all, I'd clean forgot my duty and my religion. Land's sake, how small I felt! Down went my pen and I shoved back my chair and went up-chamber 's quick as I could go.

It's well I done it. And yet it fetched me the biggest disapp'intment of my whole life long and as good as changed all my futur', my line o' business, my hopes, my everything. I was kneelin' by my bed, dreadful ashamed and just beginnin' to tell the Lord about it, when—before you could say Jack Robinson—a queer feelin' come all over me, and I was seein' things in a terrible different light. What had I been doin' these last few days? What was I lookin' ahead to doin' the days to come? I most heerd them questions asked out loud by some one, and I hid my face in the patchwork quilt and wished it could cover me up soul and body I was that ashamed. A poor young creatur', a stranger within our gates, had come to my door, come friendly and well-meanin'. And how had I acted to her? I had drawn her out, spied on her, took notice of her mistakes, set down on paper her dialections, rejoicin' over her stumblin' speech that I might set it out in

print for the world to laugh over. And all that I, Abigail Jane Kidder, might be a great authoress. Do you wonder I was so ashamed I could a-crawled under that bed if 'twould a-hid me from every human bein'. That poor young creatur'! I thinks. Was it her fault she used that form o' speech, that "lispin', stammerin' tongue," as the hymn says? Didn't most likely her own folks use it, or similar, in that fur-off land from whence she come? Mightn't I, raised 's I'd been in a civilized c'mmunity, amongst plain-speakin' folks, have got into that kind o' dialectics if my relations and neighbors had all talked it in my comp'ny? Likely enough, for language is dreadful catchin'.

Well, never mind about that next hour. That's between me and some One else. But when I got up off my knees, brushed off my skirt, and smoothed out the quilt, I knew as well as I know it this very minute that I wasn't ever goin' to be a dialectical story-writer. I'd left off that habit afore 'twas too strong to break.

I won't deny I was disappointed. I own 'twas kind o' hard, one way, to think that the 28th of May, looked ahead to so long as the day of my beginnin' to be a great authoress, was, after all,

the day of my leavin' off bein' one. But I knew my duty and I meant to do it. You might think I could a-took up some other kind of writin' that wouldn't ask me to draw out sing'lar folks and make fun of 'em. But somehow the sad turnin' out of this experiment kind o' set me agin' literary things, and I couldn't scursely look at that new pen and the clean white foolscap without feelin' qualmy. So I ain't an authoress, after all, and I guess I never will be now.

It come out after Miss Mandeville went away—I forgot to say she'd gone that very day afore I see her again, called home sudden—it come out she was from Boston way, not so dreadful fur off, after all, and was some kind of a writin' person. Some folks had it she was lookin' up dialectics herself to make pieces out of, but that couldn't be, I guess, or she wouldn't a-come here. Though mebbe she'd been misinformed, and so, after she met me and the other folks and heerd us talk, she found out she'd come to the wrong local'ty and went off. But I think of her frequent, and sometimes I find myself hopin' that though she wa'n't here long she may a-profitied a mite by what she heerd, and left off some of her own talk and took on some o' ourn. As

I said afore, language is real catchin', and we never know what little word o' ourn, dropped in season, as they say, may spring up and bear fruit—yea, a hundredfold. And mebbe even dialect, if it ain't been too long standin', may be broke up and helped, or mebbe clean cured, take it in time and afore you're too old and sot in your ways.

A NATURE CURE

A NATURE CURE

YOU see I was ailin' for 'most the first time in my life. I suppose I'd had measles and whooping cough and such things when I was a young one; I disremember. But I know I was never sick enough after I grew up to have a doctor or lay abed in the daytime. Till the time I'm telling of, I mean. I'd had a kind of tryin' time that there ain't any use of talkin' about. Everybody has their own troubles and they scursely ever come single, no more than twins do. And seems as if there was a whole flock of 'em come down on me that time and sort o' broke me all to pieces. I lost my appetite, turned again' my victuals, felt trembly and good-for-nothing mornings and didn't sleep good nights. I lost my flesh, got dreadful poor and white lookin' and, in fact, wasn't no more like the old Nancy Babbitt of a year or two back than—anything. I was living right here in Wethersfield then in this same old house built by Gramper Robbins's brother Timothy and in the family ever sence.

My neighbors was real kind and friendly and got all worked up over me and my looks. 'Course they all had advice to give and medicines to talk about. And to please them and not hurt their feelin's I took everything, advice, medicines and all. My, the stuff I swallowed that summer! All that part o' the town smelt o' boneset and hardhack, princy-pine, valerium, Injun turnip, dandelions, thurrerwort and saffron and such, steepin', boilin', settlin', drawin', smokin', as the good folks 'round there worked over their cook-stoves till they were all het up, making nasty doses to cure and stren'then and brace up their old neighbor. But nothin' done any good, I kep' on gettin' poorer and chalkier and lazier and good-for-nothin'er, with no interest in anything or anybody, not even myself. This was five year ago, before I'd ever seen you, you know; you wouldn't dream how different I looked from now, those times. I had in old Doctor Sawyer, who gave me what he called tonics, iron enough to start a foundry, bitter things for an appetite and stren'theners that made my ears ring and get deaf, but all to no good. And Mis' Talcott fetched in Doctor Churchill from Har'ford. He was a young man and new school and done all kind o'

things to me, new fangled doctorin' things, you know, like puttin' ear-trumpets in his ears and listenin' to my innards and knockin' on me all over and askin' me forty 'leven questions that didn't seem to have anything to do with my health or my lack of it. He talked about the Babbitt well o' water back o' the house, and the cistern, and Kettle Pond, 'most half a mile away. He even changed the subject to moskeeters and wanted to know whether I'd been much bit up that season, asked me if I had good teeth and could chew my victuals hard, dwelt on open winder and fresh air and talked germs and floatin' creatur's till I was all crawly. But 'twasn't any use, I done every single thing he told me to, left off everything I liked to do, biled my drinkin' water till it didn't have no taste, left my winder down at the top 'most an inch and had cold in my head for a week after, chewed my victuals till my gums was all salivated and sore, sprinkled stuff—I forget its name, means Rough-on-germs or something sim'lar—all 'round the house so it smelt like a medicine store and kep' me sneezin', and swallowed little cases, made o' glue and stuffed full o' doctor stuff, afore and after my meals so I didn't enjoy expectin' my victuals nor recollectin'

'em afterwards. No good from all of it, not a speck. But I paid the bills cheerfully and felt I'd done my duty in my poor way. I kep' on sickly and doleful, wouldn't go into comp'ny nor take part in any entertainments except meetin's Sundays and Thursday nights and o' course funerals. But they was scurse that year, only two, I believe, the whole fall, and they wasn't very interestin' ones, just the common kind o' cases we knew all about and expected, no sudden occasions, like accidents or fits. So there didn't seem to be anything to take me out o' myself and divert my mind. Even the church was lukewarmer than usual, not a sign of a revival at hand, nor any particular awakenin'. And the State's Prison down the road was dreadful quiet that year, not a prisoner breakin' out nor strikin' a keeper nor anything; 'twas real discouragin'. But one day in November, soon after Thanks-givin', there come a visitor to Mis' Julius Webster's. She was a school teacher, or she had been—I believe she'd left off—and she was dreadful nice. Harriet Webster brought her over to call, thought 'twould do me good, I s'pose. And it did, but not just in the way she looked for. Harriet told her, I guess, about my case and if she

hadn't I should have let on myself. For I took to her right off and felt sort o' drawed, most's if I knew she could help me. They didn't stay very long that first time, but when they was leavin' Miss Hubbard—that was her name—asked me if she couldn't call over next day and have a good talk and I says, "Do so; I'd admire to have you."

Well, she come. She took off her things and visited with me most two hours. And when she went away I found I'd begun to feel a speck o' hope about myself. For she'd told me o' something she was sure, certain sure, would cure me, make me my old self, only better and brighter'n ever. 'Twas a queer thing and didn't mean anything at all to me first-off. I never shall forget how puzzled and fuzzled-up I was when Miss Hubbard put her hand on my arm, lookin' into my face with her big black eyes and says so earnest, "Miss Babbitt," says she, "what you want is—" then the queerest word, I never'd heard anything like it even in doctor talk, the worst gabble on the airth, you know. I've learnt all about it sence, but that time I didn't know no more than the man in the moon what 'twas. It sounded this way as I spell it to you, "Nacher-studdi." 'Course I s'posed it was some kind o'

physic and the name wasn't any queerer or harder to say than opedildoc or 'lixer proprietatis, well-known, common medicines in every house. "My!" I says. I don't rec'lect saying anything more first-off, and she went on. "Yes, Miss Babbitt," says she, real earnest, "that is what you need to uplift soul as well as body. Let the fresh air of heaven," says she, "enter into you and cleanse and heal," she went on, and a lot about considerin' the lilies and goin' to the ants and words like that that didn't seem to me to have a thing to do with doses o' medicine and such. But when I asked about this stuff, if it was allopath, if it was a patent medicine, if it come in bottles or boxes, whether they had it over to the store, and how expensive it was, she explained it all out. It was the studyin' of natur', she said, in the new and beautiful way; readin' and learnin' what wise folks writ about birds and animals and plants and bugs and things, goin' round among them and *observin'*—how she did dwell on that word *observin'*, seemed to have a different meanin' to her from just lookin' at things or watchin' 'em—"observin'," says she, "the workin's o' natur' and the creative hand."

I ain't a goin' to tell you all she said. First

place I disremember it and then 'twould take too long and I want to give you an idee of all that come from it afterwards. When I told her I'd always liked natur', hearin' the birds sing and pickin' posies and lookin' at the squirrels and woodchucks and such creatures she said oh that wasn't no good, it was "*observin'* intelligently" that done the thing. Seemed there was books about it. How to reco'nize plants and bushes and such when you come on 'em and how to tell birds from fowls and tame creatures from wild ones and all. They're something like the Who's-Who books and they call 'em the How-Toose. Miss Hubbard give me the names of two or three, said they was so plenty just now the market was overstocked and the price real low and so I found it. Then the thing was how I could observe and study livin' things in the dead o' winter in a cold deestrect like Har'ford County. And she says I must go down South, for 'twas dreadful important, my beginnin' right away.

That come out just right, for in the nick o' time Loviny Beach from Bristol come over to see me. She told me she was goin' to Floridy next week for a throat she'd caught Thanksgivin' time and couldn't throw off and I'd better come

too. She said she was goin' to a place called Ormond, settled by Connecticut folks with lots o' Bristolers there, and goin' to stay with an old neighbor o' hern and she knew certain sure they could take me in and cheap too, and glad to do it.

Well, the end of it was I went. Such a journey! Racketted and shook up in the cars two or three days and nights, sleepin' in a box more like a coffin than a bedstead under horse blankets that wouldn't show dirt, eatin' the mite o' victuals you didn't spill, the cars shook so, and falling all over things when you tried to walk about; hard seats with straight up and down backs, dust and smoke and all kinds o' dirt all over you. My! I longed for home and the old buggy with Dolly to draw it. But I must own Ormond was a dreadful pretty place when you got there. It made me think o' the good old hymn

"Lo, on a narrer neck o' land
'Twixt two onbounded seas I stand."

Only one o' the seas is a river, the Halifax they call it, I don't know why. The village is right along the bank o' that. But you cross a bridge and go along a piece and you come to the ocean. My! what a sight. A long beach with more sand

than I ever see afore in all my born days, enough and to spare to scour every inch o' floorin' in Wethersfield or all Har'ford County. And then the soapsudsiest waves rollin' up on it out o' the indiger blue waters. Land! 'twas terrible sightly. I could study that kind of natur' all day. But that wasn't the sort to cure folks. 'Twas live stock that done that.

Loviny took me 'round—she'd been there afore—and showed me how the land lay. She knew some o' the help over to the hotel, the big one, nigh the river, and she took me there. It's a splendid tavern and kep' real nice. There was two hotel keepers that time, Mr. Rice and Mr. Sanderson. Mr. Rice he was real tall and Mr. Sanderson he wasn't. Mr. Rice was from Kentucky way and Mr. Sanderson he wasn't; Mr. Rice had a wife and Mr. Sanderson he hadn't. Mis' Rice was dreadful nice; everybody liked her, and if there'd been a Mis' Sanderson why she'd a been just as nice, I'm certain sure. Both these tavern keepers was pleasant spoken and real gentlemen every inch of 'em.

And the kitchen folks was awful nice, bein' most all from New England. There was a lady there that saw to things 'round the house; Miss

Stark was her name and she come from New Hampshire. I don't hardly know what she was to the hotel, not exactly a housekeeper though she did housekeep fine. But she done everything else too, partic'lar fixin' posies and decoratin' things. I always hold that for that line o' business Miss Stark couldn't be beat.

Well, I'd got to begin right off on the naturin'. I most wished I hadn't. For the scenery was so interestin' and different from anything I'd ever seen that I just longed to spend my time enjoyin' it. But 'course I couldn't having come fur to *observe* it—a very different thing, you know.

I wish you yourself hadn't ever been in Floridy so't I could tell you all about it. So different, so terrible different from anything I'd ever seen except in geography books. It looked so much like the pictur's o' uninhabited islands, where only man is vile, that 'twas hard for me to think it wasn't filled with heathen that bowed down to idols 'stead o' being occ'pied by real Christian folks that went to meetin'. Bananas and oranges and lemons and such grocery things growin' on the trees as calm as if 'twasn't anything uncommon and they was greenin's or pippins or Bartlett pears. And the underbrush, why 'twas just

palm-leaf fans stickin' up everywheres, only green 'stead o' buff and, o' course, none of 'em bound with ribbon or galoon, like the meetin' ones at home. House plants and tame posies growin' wild like dandelions and clovers; phlox and myrtle and widders-tears and flowerdeluces like the very ones in Wethersfield gardins just comin' up along the roads 's if they was weeds. How I did want to spend a spell pickin' some of 'em and makin' bo'quets. But the How-To books said you must pull 'em all to pieces and look at their innards and such, and then call 'em names, awful ones, like Traddy Scancher for that pretty blue widders-tears like mine in the front yard at home.

Well, I soon see I'd come to the right spot for natur' study, for 'twas all the go. You met the studiers everywheres, all kinds of 'em. Some of 'em went alone by theirselves, some in flocks. You'd meet a hull litter of 'em some days, carryin' little spyglasses and How-To books, peekin' into bushes and squintin' up into trees or tiptoin' real still in amongst the palm-leaf fans to s'prise some kind of a bird. I shouldn't think any sort of a fowl would 'a' been s'prised at their 'pearance that winter, natur' studiers was that common

everywheres. They was a real nice behaved set o' folks, I must say, and when they see me taggin' on behind 'em and tryin' to see what they was doin' they'd speak to me real kind and after a spell they gen'rally asked me to jine 'em, and I did, frequent. But deary me, after half an hour o' that kind of natur' studyin' I was all tuckered out. For 'twa'n't just lookin' at the birds and hearin' 'em sing, but they pried into all their little ways and doin's, their housekeepin's, their bathin' and eatin' and trainin' their families. Somehow it didn't seem real polite to do that, for birds has their rights. There's birds' rights as well as women's rights, I hold, and if they want to get behind a bush to wash theirselves or to eat a worm, why seems kind o' rubberin' to steal in an' watch 'em unbeknownst. Then they'd get so worked up over little things I couldn't see much int'rest in. They didn't overlook nothin', and they writ it all down in little account books they had along. Mebbe 'twas wicked, but I couldn't help 'plyin' Scriptur' words to them bird women, and thinkin' to myself how not a sparrer could fall to the ground without their takin' notice. And their ears! Good land, what they couldn't hear! The littlest, stillest dicky-

bird couldn't disguise his voice so't they didn't reco'nise it right off, and call out his name and set it down in the account books. They give the poor little creatur's nicknames too from some queer looks born with 'em and not their fault a mite, red-eyed this or white-eyed that, and red-headed t'other. But on the whole, 's I said a spell back, they was pleasant-spoken, kind folks and wouldn't hurt a baby. They was most of 'em Orderbons they said and explained to me 'twas a furren word, meanin' something like Folks-That-Won't-Wear-Feathers, Injun I guess, like Man-Afraid-Of-His-Horse, you know. I liked that part. I never could stomach women's deckin' themselves out in the pretty coverin's God dressed the birds in.

But 'twa'n't all bird studyin' I done that winter. There was a lot o' folks observin' posies and weeds and growin' things. I'd always set everything by my gardin and thought I liked wild plants and tame ones too. But seems you can't *observe* 'em without pullin' 'em to pieces, though you can look at 'em without that. I went 'round with some o' the posyites and 'twas almost ridic'lous to see and to hear 'em. Seems weeds are just as good and a mite more so than

the scrumtiousest flowers to geniwine observers. They'd stop at some weedy thing, as common-lookin' as pusley or jimson-weed, and they'd pick some o' the blowth and peek into it through little round glasses they all carried. Then they'd talk about it, the craziest talk, loonier far's I know than the bird folks, full o' words like pettles and crollers and stamuns and pistols and cal-luckses and papposes. They'd pull off leaves and squint at 'em and talk about their nerves and their veins and their teeth's if they was creatur's. And oh, the names they called 'em all! Some o' the plants I'd knowed all my life in Connecticut and it seemed real homey to see 'em down there. But I couldn't relish it as I wanted to, it riled me up so to hear 'em nick-named that way. Think o' callin' an elder bush, just like the one back o' the house in Wethers-field that I get the berries from for elderb'ry-tea, Sam Bucuss. Well, they done it. And golden-rod that comes up so bright and yeller in the fall all 'round me at home they spoke on it as the Argo, the solid Argo. Nothin' solid about it anyway; it's real soft and feath'ry. Some o' the plants they dug up to see what was down below. I could 'a' told 'em that without observin'; 'twas

roots. I knew that afore I learnt my letters. But they 'peared s'prised to find it out every time. Most of 'em carried along tin boxes, long, narrer ones, and they'd put the plants in 'em to take home for more observin', I s'pose. And the commonest plants they'd give the queerest names to. Huckleberry bushes they called something like Vaccination; I didn't 'zactly get it, and never liked to ask too many questions. And even the oak trees they called Quirks and the cattails 'long the water Typhoids, 's if they was fevers.

And with all this observin' and peekin' and pryin' into the posies they was real ign'rant o' what the 'erbs was good for and how you'd oughter use 'em. I'd put in a remark occasional as to whether this or t'other plant that looked a mite like ones at home was just as good for fits or quinsy sore throat or water-brash as the Wethersfield one and they'd sort o' look at each other and at me and own up they didn't know. Or I'd inquire if 'twas the roots or the milk or the leaves o' the Floridy dandelion that was best for a bracin' medicine and if you steeped it and took it hot or swallered it cold. Or I'd just say real modest and meek, as a beginner 'd oughter,

that that 'erb there looked 's if it might be good to draw a bile to a head, put on warm and wet up a mite. But they didn't seem to take no int'rest in that kind o' thing. And when I'd catch sight of a homey posy like some I had in the yard at home and p'int it out, Bouncin' Bet f'r instance or Red Sage, they'd put on a kind o' scornful look and say, real contemptible, "escaped from cultivation." S'pose they had; some folks act by spells as if they'd done it too.

It wasn't just the birders and planters that studied natur'. There was creatur' studiers lookin' for animals. They went creepin' and crawlin' through the brush to find squirrels and rabbits and wild mice. And even snakes! One man had a book about 'em with pictur's that made your blood stand on end; big, crawly, stripid, fat snakes painted to life, the snakiest kind o' snakes. And he went 'round observin' 'em or tryin' to, but I must say they're rather source to Ormond, and I, for one, didn't mind if they was. And these animal and creatur' studiers they did observe the queerest things that I wasn't smart enough to see, I must say. They knowed just what the squirrel, or mouse, or what-all, was thinkin' and feelin'; could tell

from his looks and behavin' what he was plan-nin' to do or what he'd done the day before, what d'nomination his church was or how he voted at 'lection, f'r aught I know. They'd see a squirrel runnin' along and jumpin' from one scrub oak to another in one o' the trails—'s they call wood-roads down there—and they'd say, "There, he rec'lects that this is the time the band stops playin' to the big hotel and the lodgers come out to walk, and he's goin' to get out o' the way." Or they'd see a medder-mouse goin' way 'round a bunch o' bushes 'stead o' through 'em and they'd tell how that creatur' had a relation way back, great-uncle or aunt or something, that had been hurt someway goin' through them same bushes and so all the medder-mice o' futur' generations always went 'round 'em. And things like that. There was lots o' stories sim'lar in my How-To books and "Creatur's I've met in S'ciety" and other volumes like that.

But about the singlares natur' folks was the bug people. Lawsey! To see them goin' out on one of their observin' trips—or observatories you might call 'em—was a sight for sore eyes. Long sticks with bags at the end made out o' moskeeter nettin', bottles and boxes and bags and I d'know

what-all hangin' to their belts. And they'd do the queerest things, runnin' all down the road, growed men and women, some of 'em real old too, after a little moth-miller, wavin' the muslin bags in the air like "an army with banners," as Scriptur' says. They'd squat in the mud and dig in it for things, they'd scrape bark off o' the trees and turn boards and stones over to see what was under 'em. They'd carry live, crawlin', hairy caterpillars 'round with 'em and raise 'em in their rooms, givin' 'em leaves and all kinds o' gardin sass for victuals. Oh, I never *did!* Goin' along the Daytony road one time, along the river, I come on one o' 'em, an old woman. She was stoopin' down to peek at a kind o' weed, a real common-lookin' thing with no blowth on it. I stopped and I see she was pickin' some o' the leaves and puttin' 'em into a little tin box. And I says, "Please, ma'am, what you gittin' them for?" And she says, "For worms," says she, and o' course I asked, "Does it cure 'em, and how do you take it?" She didn't 'pear to sense what I said and I found afterwards she was feedin' worms on them leaves to raise 'em, and then see if they'd turn into anything. 'Course they would. I could 'a' told her that.

Everything in this world turns into something else, give it time. We will ourselves, alive or dead, and why not a caterpillar? Ain't it in Scriptur' that even a worm will turn? But most of these naturers was a mite ign'rant of anything outside their own observatory ways. They had a Natur' Club that winter. A lady org'nized it that was stayin' over to the house at the shore. Folks said she learnt naturin' to studiers 'round the hull country and had org'nized more nat'ral s'cieties and 'sociations for observin' things than any other live woman; a notorious organist she was for such nat'ral historical things. The club met over to the tavern and I went to some o' the meetin's. They told their 'speriences, as you do in prayer meetin', the birders and the buggists, the posyites and the rat-catchers. My! how the big words did fly 'round that room. They made my ears ring worse 'n that bracin' medicine the doctor from Har'ford give me. Made me think of the gabble that took place when they were puttin' up that Tower in Babel, and even Scriptur' calls that a *confounded* kind o' langwidge; it don't often give way to words like that, does it? But I don't blame it this time. I felt like sayin' something worse 'n confounded

when I heerd them natur' clubbers talkin'. Oh, how mixed up I did get twixt 'em all! I disremember most of the words, thank fortun', but some of 'em come back to me, partic'lar nights when I've et a hearty supper and dream hard. I know they talked about juncos and juncusses; one kind was bulrushes and t'other sort was birds, but I don't know which was which. Seems the princ'ple diff'rence twixt a snow bird and a bulrush—the kind Moses slep' in when he was a young one—is that one of 'em's a co and t'other a cuss; both of 'em bein' juncs. Ain't it ridic'lous? The birders they talked about Red-Eyed Very-Olds and Sore-Throated Wobblers and Red-Headed Thingamys or Top-Knotted What-You-Call-Ems. And a prom'nent rat-catchin' man he told about a very scurse muss he'd found in the ma'sh grass. Then a bug-lady made a speech about a real expensive tumble-bug she'd come across or invented or somethin', the newest kind. She said she lotted on namin' it after Ormond, and if the cockroach she picked up in the orange grove turned out val'able she was goin' to call it *Sandersonus Ricei* after the two gentlemen that kep' the big tavern. One of the posyites had discovered a

new weed—as if that was somethin’ oncommon; I find a new one in my gardin about once a week—and he showed it off as proud as Lucy Ferr. Looked to me like Wethersfield pigweed, but they give it a name as long and jaw-breakin’ as Skinnyattalus or Terrydellfewgo.

I went home from that meetin’ all riled up and nervy. As I was goin’ ’cross the bridge I says to myself, “Nancy Babbitt, this natur’ bis’ness is too much for you. You never’ll make head nor tail of it and there’s no use a tryin’. Give it up afore it’s too late and enjoy the nice things God made for folks without ’temptin’ to *observe* anything. The hull danger’s in doin’ that, *ob-servin’* ’stead o’ lookin’ at things.”

I was so tuckered out that I went right to bed and drowsed off ’s quick ’s my head hit the pillar and slep’ sound all night. But I waked up early and lay a thinkin’. Seemed to me I’d wasted my time, spent my savin’s, come way off from my friends and feller Christians in Wethersfield, addled my brains over a mess of big words and things, come dreadful nigh losin’ the real likin’ I’d had all my life for posies and birds and butterflies and chipmunks; and all for what? Why did I leave my comfortable little home and mix

up with these crazy natur' folks? Then, sudden and quick come the answer, 's if somebody hollered it at me, "'Twas for your health, Nancy Babbitt; to cure your ailin's, and *where are they now?*" I set up straight in the bed, but my head was swimmy, as I thought, Where was my ailin's? I hadn't took no notice of 'em for weeks! As I set there I caught sight o' my face in the lookin'-glass on the wall at the foot o' my bed. Was that the Nancy Babbitt that left Connecticut a spell back, lean and chalk color and sickly and mopy-lookin'? Tanned and filled out, cheeks red, eyes a shinin', was that the same count'nance? "Why, I ain't a invalid no more, be I?" I says to myself or to that able-bodied woman in the lookin'-glass. And I wa'n't! Now I'm terrible fair-minded, all the Babbitts be. I'm always ready to own up to the truth, when I see it, even when it goes again' my own beliefs and holdin's. So I goes on to myself, "'Twas natur' study done it after all!" But I've got a good deal o' human natur' in me and I went on, "But 'twas the disapprovin' it, and the follerin' them loony folks 'round to prove how ridic'lous 'twas, that helped me most, after all."

There's nothin' so stren'thenin' and bracin' and liftin' up 's bein' opposed to somethin' and fightin' again' it and stickin' hard to your own belief. And that's truer in the Babbitt family, Connecticut branch, than in any other I ever see.

Well, I come home, and here I be. And I'm free to confess that I never in all my born days set so much by my posies, the cute little birds 'round the yard, the chipmunks scamperin' all over the woods and the big yeller butterflies wavin' their pretty wings in the sun as I do now sence I left off for good-and-all my *observin'* natur' and only jest look at it.

A DISSATISFIED SOUL

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IT was when Elder Lincoln was supplying the pulpit of the old Union Meeting-House in Franconia. He was a Congregationalist, but was always styled Elder, as was also any clergyman of any denomination; it was, and is now, considered there the fit and proper title for a minister. There were three places of worship in the village representing as many denominations, called colloquially by the residents the Congo, the Freewill, and the Second-Ad, these names being "short" for the Congregationalist, Freewill Baptist, and Second-Adventist churches.

The Congregationalists and Baptists held their services in the same house of worship, each taking its turn, yearly I think, in providing a clergyman. Elder Lincoln was the choice of the Congos at that time, a dear, simple-hearted old man whom we loved well.

We were sitting together, the good Elder and I, on the piazza of the little inn—it was when

Uncle Eben kept it—and talking quietly of many things. I do not recall just how it came about, but I know that our conversation at last veered around to the subject of the soul's immortality, its condition immediately after it left the body, possible probation, and the intermediate state, technically so called. In the midst of this talk I saw an odd look upon the face of the Elder, a sort of whimsical smile, as if he were thinking of something not so grave as the topic of which we talked, and when he spoke, his words seemed strangely irrelevant. "Do you know," he asked, "who has taken the old mill-house on the Landaff road, the one, you know, where Captain Noyes lived?" I did not know; I had heard that somebody had lately moved into the old house, but had not heard the name of the new occupant.

"Well," said the Elder, still with that quaint smile upon his face, "before you form any definite opinions upon this subject of the intermediate state you should talk with the good woman who lives in that old house." He would not explain further, save to tell me that Mrs. Weaver of Bradford had taken the house, that she was an elderly woman, practically alone in the world,

anxious to know her new neighbors and to make new friends.

It was largely owing to this hint that, soon after our Sunday evening talk, I came to know Mrs. Apollos Weaver, to gain her friendship and confidence, and to hear her strange story.

It was not told me all at one time, but intermittently as the summer days went by. Yet every word of the tale was spoken in the old mill-house, and I never pass that ancient brown dwelling, standing high above the road on its steep, grassy bank, with the two tall elms in front, the big lilac bush at the door, and the cinnamon rosebushes straggling down to the road, that I do not think of Mrs. Weaver and her story.

It was not in reply to any question of mine that she told it, for, notwithstanding Elder Lincoln's suggestion, I somehow shrank from asking her directly about her theological views and beliefs. I had received a telegram one day relating to a business matter, and as I sat with Mrs. Weaver at the open door of the mill-house, I spoke of it, and of the nervous dread the sight of one of those dull yellow envelopes always brought me.

"Yes," she said, "they're scary things, any

way you take it; but sometimes the writing one is worse than getting one. I never shall forget, as long as I live, the time I tried and tried, till I thought I should go crazy trying, to put just the right words, and not more than ten of them, into a telegraph to John Nelson. Over and over I went with it, saying the words to myself, and trying to pick out something that would sort of break the news easy, and yet have him sense it without any mistake: 'Maria has come back, don't be scared, all well here.' No, the first part of that was too dreadful sudden. 'Don't be surprised to hear Maria is with us now!' Oh no, how could he help being surprised, and how could I help making him so?

"For you see, Maria was dead and buried, and had been for three whole weeks!

"John Nelson had stood by her dying bed at the very end; he'd been at the funeral, one of the mourners, being her own half-brother and her nighest relation. He was the last one of the family to view the remains, and had stayed behind with Mr. Weaver and one of the neighbors to see the grave filled up. So to hear she was staying with us now would be amazing enough to him, however I could break it or

smooth it down. It was amazing to us, and is now to look back at, only we sort of got used to it after a spell, as you do to anything.

“Maria Bliven wasn’t a near relation of ours, being only my first husband’s sister,—I was Mrs. Bliven when I married Mr. Weaver, you know,—but she had lived with us off and on for years, and she’d been buried from our house. Mr. Weaver’d been real good about having her there, though lots of men wouldn’t have been, she belonging, as you might say, to another dispensation, my first husband’s relations. The fact was, she didn’t stay to our house long enough at a time for anybody to get tired of her,—never stayed anywheres long enough for that. She was the fittiest, restlessest, changeablest person I ever saw or heard of; and never, never quite satisfied. A week in one place was enough, and more than enough, for Maria. She’d fidget and fuss and walk up and down, and twitch her feet and wiggle her fingers, and make you too nervous for anything, if she had to stay in one spot twenty-four hours, I was going to say. So always just as I was going to be afraid Mr. Weaver would get sick of seeing Maria around and having a distant relation like

her at the table every meal, she'd come down some morning with her carpet-bag in her hand, and say she guessed she'd go over to Haverhill and spend a few days with Mrs. Deacon Colby, or she'd take the cars for Newbury or Fairlee to visit with the Bishops or Captain Sanborn's folks, and sometimes as far as Littleton to Jane Spooner's. Then Mr. Weaver and me, we'd have a nice quiet spell all to ourselves, and just when we were ready for a change and a mite of company and talk, Maria would come traipsing back. Something didn't suit her, and she wasn't satisfied, but she'd always have lots of news to tell, and we were glad to see her.

"Off and on, off and on, that was Maria all over, and more off than on. Why, the time she got her last sickness—the last one, I mean, before the time I'm telling you about—it was her getting so restless after she'd been staying three or four days with Aunt Ellen Bragg over to Piermont, and starting for home in a driving snowstorm. She got chilled through and through, took lung fever, and only lived about ten days.

"We did everything we could for her, had the best doctor in the neighborhood, and nursed her

day and night. Mr. Weaver was real kind, she being only a distant relation, but nothing could raise her up, and she died. We had a real nice funeral, Elder Fuller attending it, and we buried her in our own lot next to Mr. Bliven. It seemed dreadful quiet, and so queer to think that this time she'd gone for good and all, and that she'd got to stay now where she was, and not keep coming back in her restless, changing kind of way whether she was satisfied or not. I really did miss her, and I believe Mr. Weaver did, too, though he wouldn't own it.

"And here she was, and here was I half crazy over making up a telegraph to tell John Nelson about it.

"She'd been gone just exactly three weeks to a day, she having died the 11th of March, and it being now the second day of April.

"I was sitting at the window about ten o'clock in the forenoon peeling potatoes for dinner. I'd brought them into the sitting-room because it had a better lookout and was lighter and pleasanter in the morning. It was an early spring that year, though it came out real wintry afterwards, and the grass was starting up, and the buds showing on the trees, and somehow I got

thinking about Maria. She was always glad when it came round spring, and she could get about more and visit with folks, and I was thinking where she was, and how she could ever stand it with her changing ways, to stay put, as you might say. Just then I looked out from the window over towards the river and the bridge, and I saw a woman coming. The minute I saw her I says to myself, 'She walks something like Maria Bliven.' She was coming along pretty quick, though not exactly hurrying, and she had somehow a real Bliven way about her. She came straight on in the direction of our house, and the closer she came, the more she walked like Maria. I didn't think it was her, of course, but it gave me a queer feeling to see anybody that favored her so much. The window was open and I got nearer and nearer to it, and at last stretched my head out and stared down the street, a potato in one hand and the knife in the other. The sun was warm when you were out in it, exercising, and I saw the woman untying her bonnet-strings and throwing them back. Dear me! that was a real Bliven trick. I'd seen Maria do it herself fifty times. She was getting pretty nigh now, and the first thing I knew she looked up at the

house and nodded her head just as Maria used to when she came home from visiting. Then in a minute I saw her plain as day. It was Maria Bliven, sure enough; there was no mistaking her.

"I see by your face what you are thinking about; it's what strikes every soul I ever tell this to. You're wondering why I take this so cool, as if it wasn't anything so much out of the common. Well, first place, it all happened a good many years ago, and I've gone through a heap of things since then, good and bad both, enough to wear off some of the remembering. And again, somehow, I took it kind of cool even then. It appeared to come about so natural, just in the course of things, as you might say, and only what you might have expected from Maria with her fitty, unsatisfied ways. And then—well, you'll see it yourself as I go on—there was something about Maria and the way she took it, and seemed to expect us to take it, that kept us from getting excited or scared or so dreadful amazed.

"Why, what do you think was the first and only single remark I made as she came in at the door just as she had come in fifty times before after visiting a spell? I says, 'Why, good-morn-

ing, Maria, you've come back.' And she says, 'Good-morning, Lyddy; yes, I have.'

"That was all, outside, I mean, for I won't deny there was a swimmy feeling in my head and a choky feeling down my throat and a sort of trembly feeling all over as I see Maria drop into a chair and push her bonnet-strings a mite further back. She sat there a few minutes, I don't recollect just how long, and I don't seem to remember what either one of us said. Appears to me Maria made some remark about its being warm weather for the beginning of April, and that I said 'twas so. Then sometimes I seem to remember that I asked her if she'd walked all the way or got a lift any part of it. But it don't hardly appear as if I could have said such a foolish thing as that, and anyways, I don't recollect what she answered. But I know she got up pretty soon and said she guessed she'd go up and take off her things, and she went.

"There was one potato dished up that day for dinner with the skin on, and it must have been the one I was holding when I first caught sight of Maria down the road. So that goes to show I was a good deal flustered and upset, after all. The first thing was to tell Mr. Weaver. He was

in the barn, and out I went. I didn't stop to break the news then, but gave it to him whole, right out. 'Pollos,' I says, all out of breath, 'Maria Bliven's come back. She's in her bedroom this minute, taking off her things.' I never can bring back to my mind what he said first. He took it kind of calm and cool, as he always took everything that ever happened since I first knew him. And in a minute he told me to go and telegraph to John Nelson. You see, besides John's being Maria's nearest relation, he had charge of the little property she'd left, and so 'twas pretty important he should know right off that she hadn't left it for good.

"Now I've got back to where I begun about that telegraph. Well, I sent it, and John came over from Hanover next day. I can't go on in a very regular, straightahead way with this account now, but I'll tell what went on as things come into my head, or I'll answer any questions you want to ask, as you appear so interested. Everything went on natural and in the old way after the first. Of course, folks found out pretty quick. Bradford's a small place now, and 'twas smaller then, and I don't suppose there was a man, woman, or child there that didn't know

within twenty-four hours that Maria had come back. There was some talk naturally, but not as much as you'd think. Folks dropped in, and when they'd see her looking about as she did before she left, and we going on just the same, why, they got used to it themselves, and the talk most stopped.

"But though they thought she was the same as she used to be, I knew she wasn't. It's hard to put it into words to make you understand, but Maria hadn't been many hours in the house before I saw she was dreadful changed. First place, she didn't talk near so much. Before she left she was a great hand to tell about all her doings after she'd been on one of her visits. She'd go all over it to Mr. Weaver and me, and it was real interesting. But she never said one single word now about anything that had happened since we saw her last, where she'd been, what she'd done, or anything. She and me, we were together by ourselves a great deal, more than ever before, in fact, for somehow the neighbors didn't come in as much as they used to. Maria was always pleasant to them, but though they said she was just the same as ever, with nothing queer or alarming about her, I saw they didn't

feel quite at home with her now, and didn't drop in so often. But sit together, she and me, hours at a time as we might, never one word of what I couldn't help hankering to know passed Maria's lips. Why didn't I ask her, you say? Well, I don't know. Seems to me now, as I think it all over, that I would do it if I could only have the chance again. You wouldn't hardly believe how I wish and wish now it's too late that I had asked her things I'm just longing to know about, now I'm growing old and need to look ahead a little, and particular now Mr. Weaver's gone, and I'm so hungry to know something about him, we having lived together most fifty years, you know. But there was something about Maria that kept me from asking. And sometimes I think there was something that kept her from telling. I feel sure she was on the point of making some statement sometimes, but she couldn't; the words wouldn't come; there didn't seem to be any way of putting the information into words she knew, or that was used in our part of the country, anyway. Dear me, what lots of times I've heard her begin something this way, 'When I first got there, I'—'Before I come back, I'—Oh, how I'd prick up my ears, and most stop

breathing to hear! But she'd just stop, seem to be a-thinking about something way, way off, and never, never finish her remarks. Yes, I know you wonder I didn't question her about things. As I said before, I can't hardly explain why I didn't. But there was something about her looks and her ways, something that, spite of her being the old Maria Bliven I had lived in and out with so many years, somehow made her most like a stranger that I couldn't take liberties with.

"Mr. Weaver and me, of course, we talked about it when we were all by ourselves, mostly at night, when it was still and dark. It did seem real strange and out of the common someways. Neither one of us had ever had anything like it happen before to anybody we knew or heard of. Folks who'd died, generally—no, always, I guess, up to this time—died for good, and stayed dead. We were brought up Methodists; we were both professors, and knew our Bibles and the doctrines of the church pretty well. We knew about two futures for the soul—the joyful, happy one for the good and faithful, and the dreadful one for the wicked. And we'd always been learnt that to one of these localities the soul went the very minute, or second, it left the body. That

there were folks that held different opinions, and thought there was a betwixt and between district where you stayed on the road, where even the good and faithful might rest and take breath before going into the wonderful glory prepared for them, and where the poor, mistaken, or ignorant, or careless souls would be allowed one more chance of choosing the right, we didn't know that. I never'd heard of that doctrine then, though a spell after that I hardly heard anything else.

"I don't know as I told you about Elder Jane-way from down South somewhere coming to board with us one summer. He was writing a book called *Probation* and he had a way of reading out loud what he was writing in a preaching kind of way, so that you couldn't help hearing it all, even if you wanted to. And all day long, while I sat sewing or knitting, or went about my work, baking and ironing and all, I'd hear that solemn, rumbling voice of his going on about the 'place of departed spirits,' the Scripture proofs of there being such a place, what it was like, how long folks stayed there, and I don't know what all. That was just before I came down with the fever that I most died with, as I was telling you

the other day, and they say this talk of the Elder's appeared to run in my mind when I was light-headed and wandering, and I'd get dreadful excited about it.

"But at the time I was telling about I hadn't heard this, so Mr. Weaver and I would talk it over and wonder and guess and suppose. 'Oh, Pollos,' I whispered one night, 'you don't presume Maria is a—ghost?' 'No more than you be,' says Mr. Weaver, trying to whisper, but not doing it very well, his voice naturally being a bass one. 'Ghosts,' he says, 'are all in white, and go about in a creepy way, allowing there are any such things, which I don't.' 'But what else can she be, Pollos,' I says, 'she having died and been buried, and now back again? Where's she, or her soul or spirit, been these three weeks, since that?'

"'Well, come to that, I don't know,' Mr. Weaver would say. And he didn't. No more did I.

"Where had she come from that morning when she appeared so unexpected as I sat peeling the potatoes? Not a single soul had seen her, as far as we could find out, before the very minute I caught sight of her at the turn of the road. Folks had been at their windows or

doors, or in their yards all along that very road for miles back, and on the two different roads that come into the main one there were plenty of houses full of people, but nobody, not one of them, saw her go by. There was Almy Woollett, whose whole business in life was to know who passed her house, and what they did it for. She was at her front window every minute that forenoon, and it looked right out on the road, not fifteen foot back of where I first saw Maria, and she never saw her.

“Then, as to what clothes she came in, folks have asked me about that, and I can’t give them a mite of satisfaction. For the life of me I can’t remember what she had on before she went up to her room and took off her things. I’m certain sure she wasn’t wearing what she went away in, for that was a shroud. In those days, you know, bodies was laid out in regular appropriate burying things, made for the occasion, instead of being dressed all up like living beings, as they do nowadays. And Maria didn’t come back in that way, or I might have thought her a ghost sure enough. Sometimes I seem to recollect that she had on something sort of grayish, not black or white, but just about the color

of those clouds out there, just over the mill, almost the color of nothing, you might say. But there, I ain't sure, it's so long ago. But I know she had on something I never'd seen her wear before, and she never wore again, for when she came downstairs she was dressed in her old blue gingham, with a white tie apron. I own up I did look about everywheres I could think of for the things she came in, but I couldn't find them high nor low. Nor a sign of them was there in her bedroom, in the closet or chest of drawers, or her little leather trunk, and I'm certain sure they wasn't anywheres in the house when I ransacked for them, and that wasn't two hours after Maria came back.

"It's only little specks of things I can tell you about that happened after this; anything, I mean, that had to do with her queer experience. I watched her close, and took notice of the least thing that seemed to bear on that. She complained a good deal of being lonesome, and when I recommended her going out more and visiting with the neighbors, she'd say so sorrowful and sad, 'There ain't anybody of my kind here, not a single one; I'm all alone in the world.' And, take it one way, she was.

"One day she and me were sitting together in the kitchen, and one of Billy Lane's boys came to the door to borrow some saleratus. After he'd gone, I says to Maria, 'I told you, didn't I, that Billy Lane died last month? He died of lockjaw, and it came on so sudden and violent he wasn't able to tell how he hurt himself. They found a wound on his foot, but don't know how it came.' 'Oh,' says Maria, as quiet and natural as you please, 'he told me he stepped on a rusty nail down by the new fence.' I was just going to speak up quick, and ask how in the world he could have told her that, when he didn't die till a week after she did, when she started, put on one of her queer looks, and says, 'There, I forgot to shut my blinds, and it's real sunny,' and went upstairs.

"The first death that we had in Bradford after her coming back was little Susan Garret. We'd heard she was sick, but didn't know she was dangerous, and were dreadful surprised when Mr. Weaver came in to supper and told us she was dead. I felt sorry for Mrs. Garret, a widow with only one other child, and that a sickly boy, but I must say I was surprised to see how Maria took it to heart. She turned

real white, kept twisting her hands together, and sort of moaning out, 'Oh, I wish I'd knowed she was going, I wish I'd knowed. If she'd only wait just a minute for me,' and crazy, nervy things like that. I had to get her upstairs and give her some camphor and make her lay down, she was so excited like. She didn't calm down right away, and when I heard her say sort of to herself, 'Oh, if I could only a seen her!' I says, 'Why, Maria, you can see her. We'll run right over there now. I guess they've laid the poor child out by this time, and they'll let us see the body.' Such a look as Maria gave me, real scornful, as you might say, as she says, 'That! See that! What good would it do to see *that* I want to know.' Why, I tell you it made me feel for a minute as if a body was of no account at all, leastways in Maria's opinion. And yet she'd used hers to come back in anyways! 'Twas quite a spell before she cooled down, and she never explained why it worked her up so, and I'm sure I don't know. Whether it was because she thought little Susan had gone to the place she herself had come away from, and wished she had known in time to go back along with her just for company, or again, whether

she felt bad because she hadn't had a chance to give the child some advice or directions that would have helped her along on the road that Maria knew and nobody else probably in all that county did know, why, I haven't an idea.

"I believe I told you a ways back that after she got home Maria all the time had a kind of look and way as if she'd done something she hadn't ought to done, or was somewhere she hadn't any business to be, somehow as if she belonged somewhere else.

"In the old days she wasn't ever satisfied long at a time in any place, but she was always pleased to get back, leastways for a spell. But from the minute she came this time she was troubled and worried. And that grew on her. She was always sort of listening and watching, as if she expected something to happen, starting at the least bit of noise, and jumping if anybody knocked or even came by the gate. She got dreadful white, and so poor she didn't weigh no more than a child, and such little trifling things worked her up. For instance, we had heard a spell before, Mr. Weaver and me, that Mr. Tewksbury over at South Newbury was dead, and we believed it, not knowing anything to the

contrary. But one day Mr. Weaver came in and he says, 'Lyddy, you recollect we heard the other day that Silas Tewksbury was dead? Well, I met him just now coming over the bridge.' Maria was in the room, and first thing we knew she gave a kind of screech, and put her two hands together, and she says, 'Oh no, no, no, not another of us! I thought 'twas only me. Oh, deary, deary, me that's what they meant. They said it wouldn't end with me; they begged me not to try; and now I've started it, and it won't never stop. They'll all come back, all, every single one of 'em,' and she cried and moaned till we were at our wits' ends what to do. It wasn't till she found out that Mr. Tewksbury hadn't ever died at all, but 'twas his brother at White River Junction that was taken off, that she got quiet.

"So it went on, Maria sort of wearing out with worrying and grieving about something she couldn't seem to tell us about except by little hintings and such, and Mr. Weaver and me, we wondering and surmising and talking all alone nights in whispers. We didn't understand it, of course, but we'd made up our minds on one or two points, and agreed on them. Maria had

never been to heaven we felt sure of that. There were lots of reasons for that belief, but one is enough. Nobody, even the most discontented and changeablest being ever made, would leave that place of perfect rest and peace for this lonesome, dying, changing world, now would they? And as for the other locality, why, I just know certain, certain sure she'd never been there. That would have showed in her face, and her talk, and her ways. If it is one little mite like what I've always been learnt it is, one minute, one second spent there would alter you so dreadfully you'd never be recognized again by your nighest and dearest. And Maria was a good woman, a Christian woman. Her biggest fault was only her fretting and finding fault, and wanting to change about and find something better. Oh no, no; wherever Maria Bliven had come from that morning in April it wasn't from that place of punishment, we felt sure of that, Mr. Weaver and me. As I said once before, we hadn't heard then that there was any other place for the dead to go to. But from things Maria let drop, and the way she behaved, and our own thinking and studying over it, we began to come to this, that maybe there was a

stopping-place on the road before it forked—to put it into this world's sort of talk—where folks could rest and straighten out their beliefs and learn what to expect, how to look at things, and try and be tried. Last summer I heard a new word, and it struck me hard. Mrs. Deacon Spinner told me her son had gone off to learn new ways of farming and gardening and such. She said they had places nowadays where they learnt boys all that and they called them 'Experiment Stations.' The minute I heard that I says to myself, 'That's the name! That's what the place where Maria came back from, and that Elder Janeway knew so much about, had ought to be called, an Experiment Station.' But at that time, in Maria's day, I'd never heard of this name no more than I had of Elder Janeway, and the place or state he was always writing and talking about. But, after all, I don't believe I care to go back on what ma and pa and all the good folks of old times held on those subjects. There wasn't any mincing matters those days; 'twas the very best or the very worst for everybody as soon as they departed this life, and no complaints made. I'm certain sure any of those ancestors of mine, particular on the Wells side—that was pa's, you know

—would have taken the worst, and been cheerful about it, too, rather than have had the whole plan upset and a half-and-half place interduced. But then, if there ain't such a locality, where in the world did Maria come from that time? I tell you, it beats me.

"Now this very minute something comes into my head that I haven't told you about, that I don't believe I ever told anybody about; I don't know as I can tell it now. It is like a sound that comes to you from way, way off, that you think you catch, and then it's gone. It was just only a word Maria used two or three times after she came back, a dreadful, dreadful curious word. It wasn't like any word I ever heard spoke or read in a book; 'twasn't anything I can shape out in my mind to bring back now. First time I heard it she was sitting on the doorstep at night, all by herself. It was a nice night with no moon, but thousands of shining little stars, and the sky so sort of dark bluish and way, way off. Maria didn't know I was nigh, but I was, and I was peeking at her as she sat there. She looked up right overhead at the sky, and the shining and the blue, and then she spoke that word, that curious, singular word. I say she spoke it, and that

I heard it, but somehow that don't make it plain what I mean. Seems 's if she only meant it, thought it, and I sort of caught it, felt it— Oh, that sounds like crazy talk, I know, but I can't do any better. Somehow I knew without using my ears that she was saying or thinking a word, the strangest, meaningest, oh, the curiouesest word! And once she said it in her sleep when I went into her room in the night, and another time as she sat by her own grave in the little burying-ground, and I had followed her there unbeknownst. I tell you, that wasn't any word they use in Vermont, or in the United States, or anywheres in this whole living world. It was a word Maria brought back, I'm certain sure from—well, wherever she'd been that time.

“Well, it was wearing to see Maria those days, growing poorer and poorer, and bleacheder and bleacheder, and failing up steady as the days went by. And one day just at dusk, when she and me were sitting by ourselves, I mustered up courage to speak out. ‘Maria,’ I says, ‘you don't appear to be satisfied these times.’

“‘Satisfied!’ she says, ‘course I ain't. Was I ever satisfied in all my born days? Wasn't that the trouble with me from the beginning? Ain't

it that got me into all this dreadful trouble? Deary, deary me, if I'd only a stayed where'— She shut up quick and sudden, looking so mournful and sorry and wore out that I couldn't hold in another minute, and I burst out, 'Maria, if you feel that way about it, and I can see myself it's just killing you, why in the world don't you—go back again?' I was scared as soon as I'd said it, but Maria took it real quiet. 'Don't you suppose I've thought of that myself?' she says. 'I ain't thought of much else lately, I tell you. But as far 's I know, and I know a lot more than you do about it, there ain't but just one way to there, and that,' she says, speaking kind of low and solemn, 'that is—the way—I went before. And I own up, Lyddy,' says she, 'I'm scaret o' that way, and I scursely dast to do it again.' 'But,' I says, getting bolder when I saw she wasn't offended at my speaking, 'you say yourself you ain't sure. Maybe there is some other way of getting back; there's that way—well, that way you came from there, you know.'

"'That's different,' says Maria. But I saw she was thinking and studying over something all the evening, and after she went to her bedroom she was walking about, up and down, up and

down, the biggest part of the night. In the morning when it got to be nigh on to seven o'clock, and she not come down, I felt something had happened, and went up to her room. She wasn't there. The bed was made up, and everything fixed neat and nice, and she had gone away.

"'Oh, dear,' I says to Mr. Weaver, 'that poor thing has started off all alone, weak as she is, to find her way back.' 'Back where?' says Pollos. Just as if I knew.

"But we both agreed on one point. We couldn't do anything. We felt to realize our own ignorance, and that this was a thing Maria must cipher out by herself, or with somebody that was way, way above us to help her. It was a dreadful long day, I tell you. I couldn't go about my work as if nothing had happened, and I couldn't get out of my head for one single minute that poor woman on her curious, lonesome travels. Would she find the road? I kept a-thinking to myself, and was it a hard, dark one like the one everybody else had to go on before they got to the afterwards-life, a valley full of shadows, according to Scripture, with a black, deep river to ford, a 'swelling flood,' as the hymn says?

"Well, the day went by somehow,—most days

do, however slow they seem to drag along,—and the night came on. Though we didn't mean to meddle or interfere in this matter, Mr. Weaver and me, we had asked a few questions of folks who dropped in or went by that day. Maria had been seen by people all along the same road she had come home by that other time, and on both the roads that joined it. Two or three, seeing how beat out and white she looked, had offered her a ride, but whichever direction they were going she had always answered the same thing, that she wasn't going their way. It was nigh nine o'clock, and we were just shutting up the house for the night, when I heard steps outside and the gate screamed.

"I felt in a minute that it was Maria, and I opened the door as quick as I could. There she was trying to get up the steps, and looking just ready to drop and die right there and then. It took Pollos and me both to get her in and upstairs. It wasn't any time for questions, but when Mr. Weaver had gone, and I was getting her to bed, I says, as I saw her white face with that dreadful look of disappointedness, 'You poor thing, you're all beat out.' 'Yes,' she whispers, her voice most gone she was so wore out, 'and

I couldn't find the road. There ain't but one,—leastways to go there by,—and, that's the way I went first-off. I'd oughter known it. I'd oughter known it.'

"I couldn't bear to see her so sorrowful and troubled, and I said what I could to comfort her by using Scripture words and repeating the promises made there about the dark valley and the deep waters, and the help and company provided for the journey. But that mournful look never left her face, and she kept a-whispering, 'That's for *once*; not a word about the second time. Mebbe there ain't any provision for the second time.' And what could I say?

"I believe I haven't told you how much time the poor woman spent those days in the graveyard, sitting by her own grave. I can't get over that, even after all these years, that queer, uncommon sight of a person watching over their own burying place, weeding it and watering it as if their own nighest friend lay there. I don't see why either. I don't even know whether her body was there. Folks don't have two, and she'd brought one back, and was in it now. And, as far as we could see, it was the very same body she wore when she died, and that we'd buried

next to Mr. Bliven. Anyway, she appeared to like that place, and showed a lot of interest in taking care of it. There wasn't any headstone. We had ordered one, but it hadn't come home when she returned, and we had told Mr. Stevens to keep it a spell till we fixed what to do about it. I was glad it wasn't up. I can't think of anything that would be more trying than to see your own gravestone with your name and age and day you died, with a consoling verse, all cut out plain on it. I know, one time, I saw her putting a bunch of sweet-williams on that grave. She looked sort of ashamed when she saw I was watching her, and she says, a mite bashful, 'You know they was always her favorite posies.' 'Whose?' I asked, just to see what she'd say. But she was so busy fixing the sweet-williams she didn't take any notice.

"Maria failed up after this right along, and pretty soon she was that weak she couldn't get as far as the graveyard, hardly even down to the gate. And I says to Mr. Weaver that she needn't worry about finding the way back to where she belonged, for she'd just go as she went the other time if she didn't flesh up and get a little ruggeded. One day, when I went into her room, she says

to me, 'Lyddy, I want help, and mebbe I can get it in the old way we used to try. You fetch me the big Bible and let me open it without looking, and put my finger on a verse and then you read it out. Mebbe they'll take that way of telling me what to do, just mebbe.'

"I never approved of that kind of getting help, it always seemed like tempting Providence, but I felt I must do most anything that would help satisfy that poor woman, and I got the Bible. She opened it, her lean hands shaking, and she laid one of her bony fingers on a passage. I must say it took my breath away when I saw how appropriate it was, how pat it came in. 'Twas in Ezekiel, and it went this way: 'He shall not return by the gate whereby he came in.'

"Maria give a sort of cry and laid her head back against the pillow on the big chair she was sitting in. 'There, there,' she says, all shaking and weak, 'I most knew it afore, and now I'm certain sure. I've got to go—the—old—way.'

"And so she did. After all, I wasn't with her when she went, and it wasn't from our house she started. I got run down and pindling from taking care of her and studying how to help her out of her troubles. So Mr. Weaver wrote to

John Nelson, and after a spell it was fixed that he should take Maria over to his house in Hanover, and he did. It was a hard journey for her, so weak as she was, and she didn't stand it very well. But she had one more journey to take, the one she'd been dreading so long, and trying to put off.

"It wasn't so dreadful hard, I guess, after all, for they said she fell asleep at the last like a baby. Just before she went, she says very quiet and calm, all the worry and fret gone out of her voice, she says to John and Harriet, who was standing by the bed, 'I'm dreadful tired, and I guess I'll drowse off a mite. And mebbe I'll be let to go in my sleep.' Then in a minute she says slow and sleepy, her eyes shut up, 'And if I do, wherever they carry me this time, I guess when I wake up I shall—be—satisfied,' and she dropped off.

"I guess she was, for she went for good that time and stayed. She was buried there in Hanover in John's lot. We all thought 'twas best. It would have been awk'ard about the old grave, you know, whether to open it or not, and what to do about the coffin. So we thought 't was better to start all over again as if 'twas the first

time, with everything bran-new, and nothing second-handed, and we did. But Maria Bliven's the only person I know that's got two graves. There's only one headstone, though, for we took the one we'd ordered before from Mr. Stevens, he altering the reading on it a little to suit the occasion. You see, the first time we'd had on it a line that was used a good deal on grave-stones then, 'Gone forever.' That didn't turn out exactly appropriate, so we had it cut out, and this time we had on—Elder Fuller put it into our heads—that Scripture verse, a good deal like Maria's dying words, though I don't believe she knew she was quoting when she said it, 'I shall be satisfied.'"

"Well," said good Elder Lincoln one July day as we met on the Lisbon road, "have you heard Mrs. Weaver's account of Maria Bliven's unexpected return?"

The Elder had been at Streeter Pond fishing for pickerel, for he belonged to that class styled by dear old Jimmy Whitcher "fishin' ministers." He had not met with great success that day, but he had been all the morning in the open, and there was about him a breezy, woodsy, free

look which seemed to dissipate shadows, doubts, and dreads. "Yes," I replied, "I have heard it all. What in the world do you make of it?"

"Well, I don't make anything of it," said the Elder. "There's no conspicuous moral to that story. Mrs. Weaver did not make the most of her opportunities, and we do not gain much new light from her account. Old Cephas Janeway, who wrote a ponderous work on *Probation* which nobody read, was largely responsible, I guess, for the feverish dream of the old woman. But to her it's all true, real, something that actually happened. And, do you know, somehow I almost believe it myself as I listen to the homely details, and it brings 'thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls.'"

He was silent a minute, then taking up his fishing-basket, very light in weight that day, he raised the lid, looked with unseeing eyes at its contents, and said absently, "I can't help wishing I had met Maria after she came back. There is just one thing"— He did not complete the sentence, and I saw that his thoughts were far away. With a good-by word which I know he did not hear, I turned aside, leaving him there in the dusty road.

A PROPHEPIC ROMANCER

A PROPHEPIC ROMANCER

NO, I don't remember when it first came into my head that I could write, write for print, I mean, of course. I'd always been a great letter-writer, thinking nothing of covering a whole sheet of foolscap to send off to Cousin Hannah at Hebron or Aunt Lois way out in Ohio. I was good at compositions, too, they said, writing my own just as soon as the subject was given out and then helping the other boys and girls on theirs. That was to Miss Faxon's school, you know, not far from the Congregational meeting-house. I wasn't born here in Stonington, but over to Mystic. Pa and ma moved here when I was a baby, and here I was brought up and here I lived till a grown-up girl; in short, up to the very time I'm going to tell you about. We lived in another house then, way down by the water, nigh Captain Jared Smith's, and not very far from Iry Pendleton's—you know the grandchildren of both of them, in New York, I guess.

I was an only child, and my folks was pretty well-to-do, so I had an easy time and maybe was a mite spoilt, as they say only children are apt to be. There isn't much to tell about my doings as a young one nor even as a growing girl, so I'm just going to skip over to the time you want to hear about and some notion of which has come to your ears.

Pa and ma were both dead, died in the same year, him from cold and over working the night of the rope-walk fire when so many houses were threatened, and ma from lung fever a short time after. I was left comfortable, plenty to live on in my quiet way. The house was mine, and I kept right on there. But I didn't have enough to do, that was my great trouble. There was a garden, but I didn't care much for garden-ing; I raised a few vegetables, and I had a small posy patch, but they almost took care of themselves, and I hired Joe Burdick to do the hard part of the work. I tried to help in the church, but there wasn't really much to do there. They didn't have so many ways of church work then with all kinds of unions and societies and associations, and a Christian Endeavorer had never even been heard of in Stonington them times. I

went to Sewing Society every Wednesday afternoon, and had it at my house when it came my turn. I got subscribers for *The Messenger* and carried it 'round and distributed tracts when they wanted me to. I worked for the fair when they held it, and generally had a table, and was always regular at meeting Sundays, and to Thursday evening lecture and Saturday night prayer-meeting. They never had any of these clubs for ladies they have everywheres these days where they get things out of books about pictures and politics, religion and geography, copy it all out on clean, nice paper tied together with ribbon and read it to the meeting. Nor the other kind where they study all winter about some big poetry-writer and guess what he meant by some verses that don't seem to have any sense at all. More'n likely he didn't mean 'em to have any. Clubs like that would have been real musical to me them days and helped pass the time wonderful. Women's clubs they call them now. I should like to have seen the body that would have dast to speak of me or any of the best Stonington ladies as *women* those days. We was *ladies* and lived up to it, or meant to. Might about as well have called us females.

So, some ways or other, just when I don't recollect, as I said before, it come into my head that I'd be an author. I guess it was reading some story in a paper, or maybe a magazine, that made me think I could write something about as good. At any rate, the notion came, and came to stay.

My first piece was to be a story, and I thought it all out before I began to write. I had some common sense, so I made up my mind at once that I must lay it in just such a place as I'd lived in all my days, for that was the only kind of country I knew enough about. It was to be nigh the salt water, amongst the seaweed, the boats, the whale ships, and sailors. The story was to be called after the principal character, the hero, as the books say. 'Twas to be named "Egbert Winchester." That sounded real well to me. There was a Lord Egbert in a book I'd been reading, and I had an acquaintaince over to Westerly whose middle name was Winchester, from a place in Massachusetts. I wrote the title big and plain at the top of my first sheet of foolscap and begun.

Then come the first surprise and riddle of all the riddles and surprises that followed. I was

setting in the east room, as we called it, the pleasantest, homeyist room in the house, I always thought. It looked out on the salt water, which was sort of grayish-blue that day, streaky and tumbly, for there was quite a blow. John Almy's boat, dark green with the name *Lizzie M* in red, and Ed. States's with a white stripe 'round it, and a dory or two, was bobbing up and down by the stakes they was tied to. Betsy Hallam's three boys was wading nigh the shore, and Joe Hubbard running up and down Stanton's dock with Leo, his dog. Thinks I to myself, "I'll just begin my story by describing what I see from the window now, just exactly as it is." So I dipped my pen in the ink-bottle and set off. The first words was to be—I'd composed it in my head—like this, "I gazed upon the stormy sea and the sandy shore." But what do you think I set down instead? My writing run exactly this way: "I gazed upon the distant hills with the clouds around their tops."

"Mercy me!" I says to myself, "what on earth is the matter with me? Hills! There ain't any in sight, ain't hardly one in reach except Lantern Hill, and that ain't high enough to have clouds around it. I really believe I must have

been napping and dreamt I was in a foreign land."

I took another sheet and begun again, taking a good squint first at the water and the boats, the whole picture I had looked out on so many times—all my born days, in fact. But, as I turned away from looking and dropped my eyes down to the white paper, the whole pictur', so nat'ral and homey, sort of faded away even from remembering, and I was looking on mountain-tops way down below me, fur-off ponds and streams, real little in the distance, and soft, white, woolly clouds down amongst 'em hiding some of 'em from sight. I rubbed my eyes, but it didn't help, and I see it was inside my head and mind the trouble was. I never had been nervy and fussy about myself. I had the Hancox common sense—my mother was a Hancox, you know—and I wasn't easy flustered, but 't was a mite upsetting.

I lay down my pen and says to myself, "Now, Prudence Shaw, it's time you stopped this nonsense. Give up your composing stories for this time and try to compose yourself."

We didn't have all these soothing medicines then that folks take nowadays every time they

feel cross or tired of doing nothing or mad at somebody. But we had tea, dreadful good tea, brought straight across from Chiny and such tea districts, and that was real comforting. I went into the kitchen and made a pot of my best company Hyson, and I drank two cups. Then I laid down on the sofa and tried to doze off. But I couldn't. Spite of the tea—and I'd made it good and strong—I was wide-awake, thinking hard and seeing strange things as if I remembered 'em plain and clear. But they was things I never had seen in all my born days. For always, always, every single time, I was up on the mountains, high mountains, too, looking down from high up, not straight across water as I'd done all my life over to Watch Hill and the Hummocks and Fisher's Island. I'd try hard, with my eyes tight shut, to think of something nat'ral such as I'd looked out at only a few hours before. I'd say to myself: "Don't you remember that handsome sunset you saw Tuesday from the parlor window, when it went down, a big red ball, behind Noah Cheesebro's store, with the sky all yellow-gilt 'round it, and how it dropped into the water nigh Cyrus Pendleton's wharf? Or can't you seem to see the *Tiger* coming in from her

long whaling voyage as she did a spell back, and the sailors hurrying ashore? Can't you most smell the hot tar in those big iron pots at the wharf, mixed with the salty seaweed and lots of other smells you've known and loved all your life? Just stop and pictur' out the breakwater, the rope-walk, and the old lighthouse down to the Point, can't ye now?" Maybe for a minute I could bring it up and sense it, but before I could catch it to hold and look at plain 'twould fade out like a nice dream you want to think of when you wake up in the morning sometimes. And there, instead, would be great rough black rocks, all sizes and shapes, acres and acres of them, as far as I could see, deep dark hollows where I couldn't see the bottom, with sides like walls of stone, steep and slippery. And way, way off in the distance, holes in the clouds would show me ponds shiny as looking-glass, looking no bigger than saucers, rivers just as shiny, like lines of silver wire, and little plaything villages with mites of doll-houses in 'em. There wasn't any salt, fishy, seaweedy smell, but while I was seeing—or remembering—with my eyes shut tight there'd seem to be such a different air but every bit as nice and even more

nat'ral, a strong, bracing, high-up air that made me catch my breath and think of heaven and everything high and big and deep. Winds that most took me off my feet, thick wet fog without a bit of salt in it, shutting out every single thing from sight, and then, in a jiffy, lifting up like a curtain at a show so I could see all the wonders of the world for a minute before it come down with a run and hid it all. Oh, where had I seen all this before or ever dreamt or read about it! I couldn't tell; it beat me.

But I wouldn't give up. I was just crazy to write that story. I thought of it every hour of the day and it kept me awake nights. Seemed as if it was all inside my head on to the very end of the last chapter. I felt it swelling and growing and trying to get out and be writ down, till I thought my brain couldn't stand it a minute longer but must bust open. I've often wondered if all authors feel that way when they're thinking up a story or composing a piece of poetry.

Bimeby I see there was no use struggling, I must write it some ways. And as I couldn't make it go at all as a Stonington sort of seashore, salt-water story, why, I must just lay it in the

mountains where it seemed to want to start out and do the best I could.

I knew some authors did that way, and writ about places and things they'd never seen in all their lives, so why shouldn't I try it?

I began over again and let my story, the beginning of it anyway, lay in the mountains, and most of it on the top of the highest mountain amongst 'em. I grew dreadful fond of that hill. It was queer how I got to feeling I'd lived there myself and knew it just as well as my own Connecticut home. It was a strange place, too, nothing all over it but rocks, acres and acres of them. Stonington had a good many, and I'd always thought it about as stony as any district could be. But, my! Its soil looked as if it had been strained through a cullender compared to the land up there I was writing about. There wasn't any land to speak of, 'twas all rocks. They were all shapes, all sizes, close together, crowded, for miles and miles, I should say. On some of them there was a kind of mossy covering, grayish or greeny or yellow, and there was whitish parts to some of them looking in the sun like loaf-sugar, and there was little bits of looking-glass stuff thin as paper peeling off of some of

the stones. 'Twas a wild, lonesome, uncivilized-looking place, and yet there appeared to be a house up there, right on the very top of the hill, and I was in it with the folks I was writing about. There wasn't anything else, not a tree of any kind, nor even a bush, no garden, nor, as far as I could tell, no blowth of any kind.

But I could see a road, quite a good wagon-road, though real sloping and crooked, going down from a mite below the house. Up to the end of my first chapter though, I hadn't been on that road and hadn't an idee where it went or what was on it. But I had a feeling all the time that the story had to do with that road, that something very particular and interesting was to happen on it or nigh it. I wanted dreadfully to know what it was. But one trouble about writing a book yourself is that, however much excited you be over it, you can't turn to the last page to see how it's coming out. No, not any more than you can in your own life. You've got to live that first before you know how it ends. Well, at that very time, as I'd finished the first chapter of my story—it was all about scenery and such, as most stories be—and I'd begun a fresh page with Chapter II

at the top, something else very amazing happened.

I got a letter one morning in a writing I didn't know. 'Twas postmarked Bridgton, Me., a place I'd never seemed to hear of. When I opened it I found it was from Mary York, a kind of relation of mine on pa's side. She spent one year in Stonington with 'Lijah Shaw's folks, and went to school with me at Miss Faxon's. I never had heard from her since, though I'd always liked her, and 'twas real pleasant to see her writing again. And what do you think she wrote about? She said she'd been looking over old things in a trunk up garret and she'd come across a book-mark of perforated cardboard I'd worked myself and give to her when she went away. It had "Remember me" on it in red worsted, and was sewed on a green ribbon. It brought back the old times, she said, and she'd been thinking about them and me ever since and wishing she could see me. She said she'd been spending two seasons in New Hampshire at a house on the top of Mt. Washington, helping the pastry cook and so on. She liked it up there, and it would be dreadful nice if she could have me with her this time. They wanted somebody

to help with the sewing and make souvenirs to sell to the sightseers and all, and why wouldn't I come and take the place? Well, I didn't need to work for my living, but, as I said before, I didn't have enough to do at home. I liked change, too, real well and never'd got much of it in all my life. So, to make a long story short, I decided to go, and I went.

Somehow, when I was thinking it over and making up my mind, it never come into my head about that story of mine and how it was all about mountains and such. I was so busy getting ready and planning ahead that I didn't touch the writing at all, so there wasn't anything to remind one of the queer ideas that had kept coming over me and making pictur's before my eyes when I was composing that story of mine. I put it into my trunk, though, with my writing things, to carry along. Never mind about the journey, the longest by a good sight I'd ever took. You know every step of it yourself, but it took longer then than it does now. Mary was to meet me in Portland, and she did. The rest of the way we was together and how we did talk! It was most of it about old times in Stonington, the school and the girls and boys,

and who was married and who was dead and all that.

So there wasn't room for any talk about the place we were bound for and what it looked like. 'Twas pouring rain and a high wind when we got to Gorham. Driving up the mountain I had enough to do keeping my bonnet on—my head, too, I might say—and holding my wrappings 'round me to think how things looked even if I could have seen 'em. But with the rain and fog and me wearing spectacles, as I did from a young one, and them too wet to see through, why, there wasn't any scenery or views for me the whole day. That weather lasted three whole days. Fog, fog, fog, I never see such fog. It was as wet as pouring rain and thicker than hasty pudding. You couldn't see an inch further than the window-glass. But I had plenty to do, unpacking and getting things to rights, learning what my work was to be, and making friends with the folks in the house. Mis' Rogers kept it then, a real smart, capable woman and friendly with us all. There was a nice set of help, mostly New Hampshire girls, and I felt to home right away. The third day after we got there when I first looked

out in the morning 'twas the same kind of weather, thick fog and nothing to see. I was working 'round my room about ten o'clock, when Mary York came running in and she says, "Just look out of your window now, it's clearing."

I should think it was! Such a sight! The fog was running up like a curtain at a show and there, there— Oh, it's no use trying to tell about it, you know as well as anybody in the world what's to be seen up there at such a time, but even you can't really describe it, now can you? It took my breath away, and I didn't say one word, only looked and looked. 'Twas amazing, wonderful, splendid, and all, but that wasn't what knocked me over, scared me so. 'Twas because it wasn't a new thing to me; I'd seen it all, all, every speck of it before.

The very first word I said when Mary looked at me to see how I took it was "Oh, how nat'ral, how nat'ral!"

"Nat'ral," she says, "I should say 'twas sort of unnat'ral to anybody that had lived all their life down by salt water, Stonington way. You never dreamt of a sight like this, I guess, did you?" And I says, "That's just what I have."

Just then down came the fog, shutting everything out; some one called Mary from the back-stairs, and off she run. I stood stock still for a minute and then I went over to my trunk. I took out the papers and writing things I'd left in the tray, 'mongst them that story of mine. And I read it over, that first chapter—the only one, in fact, so far. Well, 'twas hard to believe; I couldn't understand it. It's just as hard to believe now, and I've never got to understanding it yet. For there it was all written out, weeks before, by me, myself, born and raised down by the salt water with never a high hill in sight, and 'twas as good an account of what I'd been seeing from my window on the top of that sightly mountain with its head above the clouds as a body could write with it all before their eyes.

I was scared, as I said, but kind of excited and worked up, too. But, most of all, I was just crazy to go on with that story and see what would happen in it and how it would all come out. I'd read about great authors and their ways, how they'd throw themselves into their work, forgetting everything else in the world and letting their wives and children starve

or freeze while they was writing at their books or plays. Now I could understand it. 'Twas genius, the books say, that made the writers go on like that, but, dear me! I wasn't a genius, was I? I had the Hancox smartness and maybe the Shaw vanity and stuck-upness, but— Well, it's a fact, I never had an idee that I was anything out of the common. I didn't know just what to think, for I'd never felt as I'd now in all my born days before. I was all nerved up, shaky, and upset, hot and cold to once, till I could get at that writing. Well, come afternoon, I got an hour or two to myself, and I shut myself up in my bedroom and begun. I had written Chapter II at the top of the page before I left home, and now I went on. Right off, the very minute I'd dipped my pen in the bottle, I see this chapter was to be about the heroine, the young lady of the story. Now I had chosen her given name before I ever begun at all, just as I had Egbert Winchester's, though I hadn't exactly settled what her family name was to be. But, anyway, she must be called Pamela, after somebody in a beautiful book I'd read out of the village library. I wrote the capital "P" and was going to follow

with an "a." But—as it's always saying in "Cornelius, the Despot," "fancy my horror and imagine my sensations" when I see I had written an "r" and followed it with "udence." So instead of Pamela I'd gone and called the heroine by my own given name, Prudence. I made up my mind I just wouldn't give in this time. "If I do," I says to myself, "there'll be no end to it. 'Twon't be my story at all, but somebody else's, and I won't have any say about it. It's ridic'lous, I won't have it." So I took a fresh sheet, and begun again. But there! it wasn't any use, I couldn't think of a single thing to say about Pamela, but if I called her Prudence she'd go all right, and my head was crammed full of things to write about her. Of course I give in. "It's genius, after all," I says, "and you can't go against that, nobody ever did and got along." So Prudence it was, and I went on writing about her by that name. I had made her up months before, and knew just what sort of a young lady she was and what to say about her. Tall and slim, what the story-books call willowy—with real dark, silky hair, waving like, and such a white satin skin with just a mite of pink in the cheeks like Angelina

in the "Maid of the Castle," who had it "like the interior of a seashell." That never seemed to give a notion of pink cheeks to me, but then maybe we didn't have that kind of seashell in Stonington; mostly mussels and quahogs and periwinkles ours was. And she was to walk sort of gliding, with a long silken train to her dress traipsing along the floor behind her. Oh, I can see her this minute as I had her made up then, so stylish and highborn like and novelish. But she never come out like that. When I went to tell about her, all I could do, she was rather short, and real fleshy. Her hair wasn't a bit dark, but decided sandy; not red, you know, but about the color of mine those times. Her cheeks wouldn't have made even a story-writer think of shells, for they was bright red and the skin wasn't like white satin, 'less it was polka-dot pattern, from the freckles.

"What in the land makes me tell of a girl like this?" I says out loud, reading over what I had written that day on the mountain. "She's like a born and bred Stonington girl, and she was to have been a city young lady, a summer boarder at the Wadawannuck. Why, she might be me myself for all there is like a real heroine."

And she might; I see it plain as I went on. For I did go on; I couldn't help it. It was most like a crazy spell, though there never had been any of that in our family; Zaccheus Hancox wasn't our branch. I wrote and wrote, every minute I got to myself. The weather was bad all that early season, and I couldn't have got out much if I had felt like it, and I didn't want to, a mite. I just wanted to keep on at that story. In one way it was like living my own life in a new and interesting way, for I see more and more that the girl, Prudence, was me in most ways. The sandy hair, red cheeks, palish blue eyes, freckles and all were mine. She was sort of fleshy, too, like the Hancoxes, and walked quick and heavy like the Shaws. And she was always up on a high mountain, just like me.

But for all she favored me so strong in her looks and ways there was things about that girl dreadful different from me or any of my folks; oh, terrible different. For one thing, she was a Methodist and her family, too; now the Shaws, and the Hancoxes, too—our branch, I mean—were Congregational inside and out. And if there was a sect they didn't like, it was the

Methodists; they was even worse than Baptists to us all.

When I see my heroine was veering that way I did my best to head her off. Seemed as if I couldn't stand it to take my pen in hand and write her over, as you might say, into that deluded denomination. But she went. Before I could scarcely realize what she—or me—had done, she was fairly in that sect, body and soul, and happy in it, too. I stopped writing then, put the sheets away in the tray of my trunk, and made up my mind I'd never be an author. What was the use, if I didn't have any influence at all over my characters, and they done just what they pleased, spite of me, when if they'd stopped to think they'd never have been made at all nor had a breath of life except for me, the authoress of them all. I kept to that notion for a day or so. I read up some Congregational books I had, and thought over all the bad things I had ever heard about Methodists and encouraged myself not to give in. I says, "I just won't write a story where the principal female character refuses up and down to be what she is, or is meant to be by her authoress. Just at that time—I suppose it was fate or providentialness—I heard Almeny

Perry, one of the waitresses, telling the other girls that her minister was coming up next day. Almeny was nigh about the nicest of the help, a dreadful good, steady, religious girl, as we all agreed. So I says to her that I was real glad that he was coming, and would she mind introducing him to me as I wanted some help and advice, and she said of course she would and pleased to.

He came, Rev. Mr. West his name was, a pleasant-spoken, nice-looking man, and Almeny took me in to talk with him. Now, you see, I wasn't going to tell him about my story and all that, only to speak about my own denomination and its being better, of course, than any other, particular the Methodists. I thought he could sort of strengthen me in the good work and help me hold up my feeble hands. Nat'rally I took it for granted he was a Congregational himself, Almeny belonging to his church and she most the best girl I knew. But when I laid the matter before him I see a queer sort of look come over his featur's, pretty nigh a smile, and he says, "I'm afraid, Miss Shaw, I should be a mite prejudiced, advising you, as I'm a Methodist myself."

Land of the living! I never was so surprised

in all my born days, and I've had more surprise parties than most folks in my life. I couldn't speak first off, and he see something how 'twas. He spoke up real kind and he says, "So you thought I was a Congregational, Miss Shaw, did you?" "Of course I did," I says, with the tears coming, from the being disappointed and all.

"Why do you say 'of course'? says he."

"Because you look so good," I burst out, "and because Almeny— Oh, you don't mean to say she's a Methodist, too." The earth's foundations seemed shaken—I'm using words from "Cornelius the Despot" again, Stonington language don't seem good enough. I never, never will forget how good that blessed man was in my trial. He set by me and talked for quite a spell. He didn't try to change my doctrines, not a mite. It seemed he thought a good deal of the Congregationals and had some relations in that denomination. But he told me why he liked his own sect best, and he did somehow make it plain that it was the best in some ways, and when he went away he promised to send me some books to help me, and he did. And I read them, and Almeny and me had lots of talks and—well, in less than a fortnight, I found myself a Methodist heart

and soul, the first Shaw—my branch—I'll engage that ever accepted the views of what pa always called "that deluded sect."

I hadn't touched my book all that time. I was so stirred up and upset in my religious convictions, and I'd most forgot how I'd felt toward my heroine, when one day I come across the story in the tray of my trunk where I'd gone to get a clean handkerchief. I did feel sort of sheepish and ashamed like as I read it over. But I owned up handsome and made it all right with the other Prudence, my heroine, and begun writing again as if nothing had happened. It went along real smooth for a spell, but then all of a sudden there come up another little unpleasantness. It wasn't no great of a trouble, but it put me out of sorts. All the Shaws in the female line, two or three generations 't any rate, had been musical, sung in the choir, learnt singing to scholars in school, and so on. And every single one of them had sung "second," as we called it then, alto was a word come later in our part of the country. Grandma Shaw sung second in the choir at Mystic for years, and Aunt Angeline Clift come after her. I remember both of them, and how low and deep their notes was.

Aunt Angie always said she could sing bass better than her brother, Uncle Nathan, and I guess she could, for he had rather a squeaky high-toned voice at his lowest. I myself always sung second, couldn't reach a high note anyways. And now just as I was going to have my heroine singing to herself all alone in the twilight, sitting on a big ragged rock on the mountain and looking over to the west, just as I was about writing of the "low, rich deep notes," I found myself telling of the "high, shrill, sweet, treble voice." As soon as I see what I'd wrote I crossed it right out, set my teeth and wrote over again, meaning this time to make that voice low enough and deep enough so there wouldn't be any mistake, but—what I wrote was like this: "Did any other being ever reach such lofty, piercing heights as that treble of hers got up to easy?" or to that effect, you know. Treble! and her a Shaw—for by that time I knew she was a Shaw and meant to keep her so. I slat that sheet of foolscap to one side, and into my trunk tray went the whole pile of writing. Well, you see what's coming, of course. Not twenty-four hours after, as I was at work in the linen-room singing to myself "Roll on, Silver Moon," Mary York came along and she says:

"Why, I didn't know you had such a good treble voice, Prudence, thought you always sung second. But you go higher than I can, seems if."

And I did. By bedtime next day I was singing the highest of anybody in that house and taking treble parts in all the tunes. Then I gave up. I see I'd started this girl of mine in life, and I'd got to let her go on, and nothing I could do would stop her or turn her. What's more, it looked as if I'd got to follow in her steps, even if they stomped on every belief and habit and way of the Shaw family—our branch. She dressed in pink. We'd always held that wasn't becoming, the Shaws being all sandy-haired. I let her, not opening my mouth. And that week Aunt Hannah Langworthy sent me a new neck ribbon of bright rose pink. I tried it on, and somehow it looked real nice, taking the sandy look out of my hair instead of putting more in, and I wore it.

She ate shellfish that had been poison to us Shaws from the creation of the world, Grandpa's brother Ephraim dying from hard-shell crabs and Cousin Priscilla Moss laying at death's door for weeks from clam chowder. 'Course I found myself taking in Portland lobster within three days

after and relishing it. So on and on and on. I've spun this out, and it sounds as if it took a long time for it to happen. But it was only a few weeks from beginning to end.

You see, I had not brought the hero in yet. I just hated to introduce him for fear he'd go and turn out something different from what I wanted him. Way back in Stonington I'd dreamed about him and he was—oh, such a noble-looking gentleman! 'Course, he was a city person and a summer boarder. Like Roanoke Lamont in "The Disinherited," "no disfiguring toil had marred his slender white hands," he was just aristocratic all through. I'd stand firm about that, I says to myself. If the heroine wanted to turn out a country girl, well and good. But he should be of high birth and stoop a good way down to lift her to his wealth and station.

It come about so different. I told you I didn't go out very much. I never was no great of a walker, and nigh the hotel it was hard going, dreadful stony and rough. I had seen the road now that I had dreamed about in the beginning of my book, a long sloping wagon-road going down the mountain. You could see it from the platform and the windows of the house. I never

looked down at it, but what I felt a queer, choky, swallowy feeling as if something had happened to me thereabouts or was going to, some day. I couldn't scursely tell whether 'twas to be something good or sort of bad. It made my eyes get all wet and fetched a ball up in my throat, and yet there was something nice about it, too. Was the principal characters going to meet somewheres along that road, and maybe in terrible circumstances?

I guess I forgot to tell you that way back in Stonington, before ever I put pen to paper, when I was thinking up my story and just got to making up the meeting for the first time of Pamela and Egbert, there came into my head quick and sudden—that's the way great thoughts come, they say—these singular words: "She held out to him her left hand, for the other——"

The idees stopped running like a candle going out, and I was in the dark and hadn't the least notion why she shook hands in that awk'ard way. I thought it more than likely the next words would have been "was stained with another's blood" or "polluted by the touch of"—somebody or other, probably a base wretch, or something of that sort.

One afternoon when I had an hour or two for

myself ahead of me I set down to my writing. The other girls and boys that had leave to, had gone off to walk; some down the Crawford bridle path, some to Tuckerman's Ravine (a good name for that dreadful scramble, Sim Colton, the engineer, used to say, "for, if anything will *tucker a man* out, that climb will," he says), and some down along that wagon-road. I could see this last lot from my window as I set there, strolling along, two by two mostly, and passing out of sight 'round the bend, and I wondered what was on ahead there and what it was that had happened or was going to happen along that road, and if it was me it would happen to or was only something in my book and in the life of the made-up Prudence. Then I began to write. I see right off I was going to describe the hero. In fact, the chapter was to be called by his name, and I must write that down first of all at the top. It was to be Egbert Winchester, you know. I wrote a big "E" with a flourishy capital, and was just going to follow it with a "g" when my pen sort of shook a mite and I see I'd made a "z", and before I had time to cross it out it run on quick. And there, if you will believe it, instead of Egbert

I'd gone and writ Ezry, a Bible name, you know, but used common in Connecticut, and, I guess, all over New England. Ezry! And him to be a city gentleman, lofty as anything. Dear, dear! Genius or not, I couldn't have it. I crossed the whole word out with the blackest, inkiest mark I could make and begun again. The "E" come out all right and flourishy, but the pen, spite of holding it tight, with my fingers most down to the p'int, wriggled crooked and made a "z," and then run on with "ra," and there was Ezry over again, and I was mad, ashamed, and terrible discouraged. "It ain't any earthly use," I says, most crying, "but I'll have to let it go now or I can't write at all. So I'll just not take no notice of this, and say nothing about the last name at present, maybe bimeby when they've forgot about it I can slip it in without them noticing." Who I meant by "they" and "them" land knows! I suppose I was alluding to the something or somebody inside or outside of me that had someways took charge of this story of mine.

The chapter begun by describing Ezry, as it kept on calling him. And every single thing went crooked and crossways. He ought to

have been tall, towering above his peers, but he come out a mite below the average. I wanted him lithe—that always seemed such a splendid word to use—but he was actually stocky, not precisely stout nor fleshy, but square-built and strong-looking. His hair was to be black as a raven's wing, and his eyes dark and flashing. But my pen went and gave him kind of lightish yellow, flaxy kind of hair, with eyes of the commonest drab gray color, with palish eyebrows and eyewinkers. And his hands! Deary dear, how I struggled with them hands! But whiten 'em and smooth 'em as much as I could, they come out big and rough and brown, with plenty of signs of hard work or what the book called disfiguring toil. Yes, everything, every single thing went wrong. He didn't stride with a haughty air, but sort of loped along a bit awkward; his features didn't wear a look of proud disdain, but I own up 'twas a pleasant expression, real friendly. And his clothes! There, I can't even now—years afterwards—talk about them and how different they turned out from the clothes—garb, I mean—Egbert Winchester was to have been dressed, I mean attired, in. When he come in first with them

on I dropped my pen, making a big blot, and leaned back in my chair, putting my hands up over my face. As it says in "Dominic Wycherly's Revenge," "a torrent of tears came to my relief"; 'twas something of a torrent, for my handkerchief was just sopping. I was so terrible disappointed, you see. My last hope of having this story my own work was gone. I'd got nothing on earth to do with it. Call it genius or what all, something was to work inside or outside of me, and it done what it was a mind to. You'd think the easiest way out was to stop writing, tear up the story, and give it up. But I just couldn't. If you'd ever been an author you'd know that. Write I must, my own way if I could, but if not, why, somebody else's way. If I could have made my heroine a real Pamela and up to her name, I'd have been tickled to pieces. But as I couldn't do that I'd got to write about her anyways, Pamela, plain Prudence, or be-she-who-she-be, as Aunt Libby Howe used to say. And the same with my hero.

So the very next day I found myself at my scribbling again and picturing out Ezry, he that was Egbert. Different as he was from my intended, as you might call him, it was queer

how interested I got in him and how I kind of liked him. He really was easier to get along with than Egbert would have been, and I felt more at home with him. So I went slow over the describing him, and I hadn't even introduced him and Prudence to each other when my writing was interrupted sudden. I remember the very line I'd finished that time. No wonder, for I've read it over since, lots of times. These was my last words:

"How little did my hero dream that fair morn that on that very road he was to meet his fate!"

That road again, I says to myself. I must go down there some day and see what it's like, and why in the land it always gives me such a stirred-up feeling to think about it. Just then I see it was raining; it most generally was that season. I guess falling weather ain't ever very scurse up there. My window was open, and I went to pull it down. The sash was wet and slippery and somehow slid through my fingers. I tried to stop it by putting my hand under it and shoving up. But down it come right on two of my fingers. There's no use telling how it hurt. Most everybody at some period of their lives has had such a thing happen, and if there's

anyone that hasn't, why, they'd better not hear about it till it comes. My hand was no use to me for quite a spell, tied up, and dreadful painful. So my writing wasn't took up. I was most sick for a few days with the ache and the fevery state it kept me in, and I scursely thought once of the story and where I'd left off.

It come out real pleasant one day after dinner and Mis' Rogers urged me to go out and take a walk. "Go a piece down the road, the carriage road," she says, "you'll get a good view of the Glen House and all, it's so clear and it will do you good." So I went. My hand was still tied up, but it didn't ache much, and I really enjoyed things. The sun was shining, and it was real still for the Summit, just enough of a soft blow to cool you. And the view! Now tell me, is there a sightlier, viewlier spot on the Lord's earth than that mountain top at its best? I was looking out at it as I went along, remembering how it surprised me the first time I see it way back in Stonington and noticing how exactly like that same pictur' it was to-day. But somehow it didn't bother me or make me wonder how it come about. I just took it as it was, feeling quiet and dozey and still and

dreadful contented. I'd forgot my wondering about this road and what was to happen along it, when I see a figure way down, round a bend, coming slowly up the road. 'Twas too far off to know what kind of a person 'twas, and I didn't much care. I was thinking of other things, and I wasn't ever very scary, so I just kept strolling along. As I got nigher I see it was a man, and when he was close to I see he was young, and I kind of liked his looks. A nice, healthy, strong-looking country fellow, some stocky, with a brown, pleasant sort of face. He had on rough kind of clothes, a dark-blue flannel shirt, and no collar nor necktie, and he was carrying his coat on his arm. He was het up with the climbing, and his cloth cap was pushed back so I could see his yellow hair, a mite curly, laying sort of dampish on his forehead, and I liked his looks, as I said. Just as we was going to pass each other, he stepped a mite out one side and I done the same, and my foot slipped on a loose stone so's I most fell over. I reached out my hand, my left one, of course, the other being tied up, and caught at the man's sleeve without thinking what I was doing. He took hold of my arm real firm and steadied me, and

I was all right in a minute. And then I says "Thank you." Them was the very first words I ever spoke to him. And his'n to me was "Don't mention it."

He asked me something about the way and how far it was to the hotel, and then I went on down and he went on up.

Now I see you're looking ahead, and back, too, and deciding right off that this was the great thing that was to happen on that road to the heroine of my name. But that's no sign that I done the same. I didn't. True as I live, my novel or anything relating to it never come into my head that whole afternoon. I went on quite a piece before I turned, and I won't deny I thought quite a lot about that young man, for I liked his looks. When I was going back, a mite out of breath, climbing up, all of a sudden I come right on him round a turn, sitting on a stone side of the road. Somehow we spoke to each other way back that first day as if we was old friends, seems to me. And he walked along by my side. He was real polite and good-mannered, and told me his name right off. Whaples it was, and he was from Lebanon, he said. "This State?" I asked him, and when

he says, "No, ma'am, in the State of Connecticut," I wanted to scream. It was so good to see some one from the old Nutmeg State. "Call it that, if you want to," Uncle Nate used to say, "but there ain't any *greater*," that being a kind of joke, you know.

Well, we felt most like first cousins after that, and talked a streak. Mary York said afterwards she never in all her born days was so took aback as when she seen me that time coming up to the house with that stranger, him and me talking and acting so friendly and intimate. 'Twas queer, I own up, for I never had cared much for beaux and such things, like other girls. Well, Mr. Whaples liked the place and said he'd admire to stay. They chanced to need another man at the stables just that very time and he took the place. 'Twas the old story, you see; I liked his looks, as I said before, and I liked them better as the days went on. I liked his ways, too, and it wasn't long before I see he liked mine. I let him know the worst first-off. That was always a real Hancox habit, not putting on company manners to deceive folks as some families do. He told me he was a Congregational and all the Whapleses—his branch

—was that, too. I owned right up, honest, that spite of my bringing up and the views all my family held, I was a Methodist, though, there not being any church of that persuasion—nor any other, to tell the truth—on the Summit I hadn't yet took the last step. He didn't seem a bit put out, though he didn't say anything. A spell after, as we were sitting talking with some of the help, somebody asked him what church he belonged to. He says real quiet, without looking my way, he says, "My folks are Congregational, and I used to hold with that kind; but now I'm thinking of going over to the Methodists," he says.

I told him, too, how I'd gone back on lots of the family beliefs, how I'd raised my voice from a low second to a high treble; that I'd took to wearing pink that no Shaw before me had ever held as becoming; and how I even eat shellfish that had always before been to our family like pork to the Jews. It didn't make any difference to him, nor change his favorable views of me and my ways. All I done, he thought, was just about right, and what I didn't care about he didn't set much by himself.

But he had one very singular way of speaking.

I couldn't seem to understand it. When I'd tell him some of my beliefs or holdings, he'd say sort of low to himself like, "I knew it," and really sometimes he'd show he knew some of my ways by speaking of them before I'd told him about them. I begun to wonder. 'Twasn't many hours after I met him first that I found out what his given name was. 'Twas Ezry. That ought to have come over me as a big surprise, you'd think, but it didn't. Sing'lar as it may seem, I never thought at first how strange and fulfilling 'twas, for my book and that hero of mine had gone clean out of my head. You see, a more interesting story with him and me for principal characters, had begun right off and there. He knew what my name was the first day, for he heard the girls calling me by it. 'Twas then I noticed for the first time that queer habit of his'n, for when he heard Ellen Hawes call out "Did your walk do you good, Prudence?" he just says, low to himself like, "I knew it." Somehow, every time I heard him say that, a choky, swallowy feeling would come over me, but I couldn't tell why.

I was with him the first time he ever see that mournful object, the gravestone of Lizzie

Bourne. I hadn't got used to that story then, a dreadful sad one, and as I told him about the poor girl and how she lost her life up there my eyes was wet and my voice shaky. He didn't seem worked up much and not a bit surprised. He just says, low like, to himself, "I knew it," and I didn't dast ask what he meant. So 'twas about everything, I couldn't show him anything new. Seemed 's if he was interested, but only like somebody that's come back to a place he used to know well. The Tip-top House, the Northern Peaks, the lights over to Berlin on a clear night, even that surprisingest sight you sometimes see, the shadow of the mountain itself showing against the afternoon sky, they was no news to him. He'd just look at 'em calm like and then say soft, "I knew it."

Love matters moves along dreadful fast up on that mountain. I don't scursely know why 'tis. Sometimes I think the fog—there's such lots of it—is kind of soft and mellering, and maybe that has something to do with it. Or again, p'raps it's what they call the altitude, the high-upness, you know, that sort of raises your feelings and draws up your heart. I don't just know, but 't any rate there's a dreadful lot

up there of courting and keeping company and making plans for settling down and all. They've got a way of measuring what they call the v'locity of the wind, but there ain't a machine ever made that can measure off the v'locity of some of the sweethearting on that elevation o' land. It comes to a head terrible soon. I don't hold with telling all about your own private affairs to other folks, not even to a good friend like you, though I don't disremember a single thing that happened them first days. But one time before things were settled betwixt him and me, we was talking about the time before we'd even seen each other, as folks always do, you know, and there come out a wonderful, amazing thing. That's what you heard about, I guess. For I've told it a good many times to show these up-and-down folks that won't believe anything they don't see with their own eyes or hear with their own two ears, and can't catch hold of with their two hands. As some old book says—I don't think it's the Bible, but it might be—"there's more happenings in the heavens and the earth than Horatio," whoever he was, or any living soul ever dreamed about.

We was sitting on the rocks looking out on

what they call the Lake of the Clouds, way, way down below us. We hadn't been saying anything for a spell—there's times when you don't care about talking, you know—but all of a sudden Ezry says,

"I remember sitting here with you and looking down on that water more'n a year back."

"Remember what!" I says, all took aback, "why, we hadn't neither of us ever seen this mountain a year back."

"I had," he says, very quiet like, his eyes looking as if he was sort of dozey or dreaming, "I had, and it was just like 'tis now, and you were here and just what you be now." I was a mite scared, he looked so queer and talked so sing'lar. I put my hand on his arm and kind of shook him. "What in the land is the matter of you?" I says; "are you dreaming?"

"No," he says, taking hold of my hand and looking as if he'd just waked up, "but I guess I was for a spell nigh a year ago. Dreams don't always go by contraries, as they say, for mine's come true." Well, then he told me a story, sing'lar uncommon story 'twas. I couldn't for the world understand it no more'n I can at this very minute. I won't spin it out if I can help it, but

it was like this. Down in Connecticut, about a year before, he'd, sudden like, felt that he was built for an author, and must go to writing a book. 'Twas to be a sort of novel, and all the characters was to be first-class city folks. But it was to start in Lebanon, his own place and the only one he knew much about. 'Twas to be called "Ethelwynd Wilmot." He told me how he begun and how he tried to set down the pictur' he see out of his window. Lebanon's a inland place, you know, rolling country and not a sight of salt water around. But it was my experience over again. He kept writing about salt water, rocks, seaweed, and ships, things he'd never seen in all his born days.

Then come a part different from mine. Being a man, he was stronger, I suppose, and he broke away from the seashore part. But instead of coming home to Lebanon and the things he knew, what did he do but start of writing about high mountains 'most like the Alps he'd learnt about at school, and him being on the very toppest of all. And then the time he had with his characters! 'Twas me over again. His stylish, high-toned hero came out a common country fellow, looks, clothes, and all. When he was telling

about that and how mad it made him and how when he tried to write his name Ethelwynd, the pen would wiggle and go crooked, making a "z" and coming out Ezry, his own given name, I begun to feel scared. Oh, what if he said he was mad and disappointed when his heroine wouldn't stay stylish and citified and—I wouldn't wait. "What about the heroine, Ezry?" I says, a mite bashful.

"Well, she was to have been named Pauline, like some one in a play I'd read, and dreadful proud and queenly and all."

"Was she tall and had real dark waving hair, and her skin like satin with her cheeks like the interior of a seashell?" I asks quick and excited.

"Why, certainly," he says, dreadful surprised.

"Was she willowy?" says I.

"Some willowy," he says.

"And, O Ezry!" I asks, my voice shaking, "did she glide with haughty steps?"

"She done that," he says; "how'd you know?"

"That same girl!" I sobs out, "and I just can't bear her, poking in every time where she isn't wanted. And you—you—liked her?" I asks, for I couldn't bear what the books call the terrible suspense another minute.

"You bet I didn't," he says, so loud and decided I couldn't help believing him. "I never liked her, never felt to home with her for one single minute. I only thought a real heroine had ought to be that kind. They generally be in books, you know. But I never wrote about her after all, for she come out all different."

"How was she different?" I says, aching to know and yet kind of scary about it, too.

"Why," he says, "she come out just exactly the sort of girl to make a rough common chap like the hero (he was me over again, you know) happy. I've thought about that girl every day of my life since she come into that novel of mine, but I never see her in the flesh till—that day I come up the carriage-road, Prudence, and met—you!"

And then he—— Mercy me! there's pa at the door and the table not set. Wipe your feet, Ezry, and come right in. I've got company, you see.

